A Report for the Building Industry Consultative Council

Reinventing the Image Steering Committee

A Close Look at
Work and Life Balance /
Wellbeing in the
Victorian Commercial Building
and Construction Sector

A Report Prepared By

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February 2008

Table of Contents

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In late 2006, the Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) – an advisory group of client and employer groups, trade unions, individual employers and government - endorsed a proposal to undertake research that would inform the development of a coordinated strategic framework for wellbeing in the workplace. This framework would identify the actions required of government, industry groups, unions, employers and individuals to effectively address wellbeing issues in the construction industry.

This comprehensive qualitative research work was conducted in 2007 by two practitioners, both familiar with the local construction industry. Siusan MacKenzie, a consultant who specialises in work and life balance at the organisational level; and Louise Gartland, an Industrial Relations Victoria Policy Advisor with experience in managing IR issues in both the commercial construction and government environments.

The research project was designed to inform the development of an industry wellbeing blueprint (strategic framework) based on input from the sector. The blueprint would provide a simple outline highlighting the interrelationship of roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. It will also seek to identify the appropriate tools and support services that will be required to assist key stakeholders in implementing effective wellbeing policies and practices.

Methodology

Research for this project tested whether the current reality in Victoria matched other research and anecdotal evidence. It was intentionally designed to present a 'human' case for change by illustrating practices in the local industry with personal stories and through data provided by a survey of 130 employees (salaried and wages). The methodology used to inform this research report was segmented into four parts:

- *Part one: An employer/organisational perspective* gained through telephone interviews with senior management representatives from 17 construction companies and 8 sub-contractors.

- *Part two: An employee perspective* gained through a survey of 121 full-time employees and 19 group discussions of staff and wages employees from across the industry.

- *Part three: A review of literature* to examine workplace wellbeing policy and practice, both locally and internationally.

- *Part four: An industry stakeholder perspective* through individual discussions with a range of industry representatives.

The sample group for this project was restricted to major commercial construction companies and a selection of sub-contractors representing a range of trades working on major commercial sites around Melbourne. The rationale behind this focus is the belief that issues identified during research in the largest organisations would no doubt also be evident in other sectors. Any resulting change through implementing recommendations in the largest companies, it is believed, would also eventually filter through to these other sectors.

The Research Findings

The Employer Perspective

Interviewed company representatives overwhelmingly considered people in the industry to be "more stressed these days" – especially at management levels. This was due primarily, they believed, to 'unrealistic' tendering and programming, and the consequent long hours. Workers are being increasingly drawn away from their families to cover the extended work hours necessary 'to just get the job done.' But, employers consistently made the point that the affects of pressure on individuals are not always obvious. Pressure eventually reveals itself through absenteeism, reduced productivity, out of character behaviour, stress and mental fragility.

Employer respondents participating in this study firmly acknowledged the increasing importance of work and life balance and wellbeing issues within the industry often illustrating this with anecdotes about retention and attraction of employees. However, translating this concern into effective, comprehensive workplace strategies was almost negligible in the evidence collected. Most companies described isolated wellbeing initiatives, primarily driven by a sense of goodwill towards employees. Yet policy frameworks were non-existent, or informal, with no alignment to a company strategy that recognised the reciprocal relationship between wellbeing and productivity.

While many respondents expressed a willingness to get to the root of problems as they emerged, they also acknowledged a lack of skill and expertise to manage wellbeing issues proactively and effectively. It was generally perceived among respondents that responsibility for managing the wellbeing of staff rested with site managers (team leaders) but few had provided any appropriate training to help this group fulfill such a role.

Skill shortages also contributed to work and life balance issues affecting individuals and companies. Some people spoke of having to push staff into roles for which they were not fully competent. This often created a ripple effect of additional pressure for the individual, their subordinates, supervisors and families.

Addressing issues of work and life balance was often put in the context of making the workplace more attractive to a new generation of staff seen as demanding, confident and ambitious. However, while several respondents spoke about the desire to create a culture that supported wellbeing initiatives (to demonstrate their point of difference); they were often faced with managers who clung to the 'old school approach' to the work environment.

The majority of respondents, but certainly not all, recognized a link between wellbeing/work and life balance with OHS issues. However, the interviews revealed an almost universal lack of understanding of the role of HR strategy and its potential value to company sustainability.

Respondents generally believed that pressure will only be reduced through an industry-wide approach empowered by the courage to address tendering and programming issues.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

The Employee Perspective

The discussion with employees, and their responses to the survey, provides an indication that these men (only two women participated in discussion groups) find work/life balance issues challenging. Excessive workloads and overly long hours are not compatible with wellbeing. These were linked with high levels of stress, deteriorated personal relationships and physical health. More importantly, it cannot be denied that the employees participating in this project have been ingrained in a culture from which they cannot seem to escape.

The survey results indicated that work has a greater spillover to personal life than the other way around. It is the partners, parents and mates who provide support and counsel – not the employers, although they are best placed to make a positive difference to reduce the pressure of work/life conflict.

Discussion with employees pointed to the need for managers to improve their communication skills and to understand their important role in *"making or breaking"* the wellbeing of individuals under their control. Employers who demonstrated respect for their employee group as individuals were rewarded with heightened morale and productivity.

The arrival of lifestyle centred 'Generation Y' into the workforce, and the aging construction workforce is adding weight to the demand for integrated wellbeing strategies, including more flexible work practices and greater opportunity to achieve a balanced life.

The Literature Review

The extensive *Literature Review* of broader international research and experience, while independent of the other research components of the project, mirrored the same issues and policy implications that have been highlighted throughout the direct local discussion. It thus provides further weight to the arguments presented.

The first two sections of the literature review provide an outline of broad and specific industry work/life issues, such as:

- the pressures that come with competitive tendering (long hours etc.)
- the cyclical nature of work
- the strongly entrenched male-dominated culture
- labour and trade skills shortages.

The implications of these both for the individual and the construction industry are also discussed:

- Impact on physical safety
- Burnout and low productivity
- The 'silent epidemic': stress, depression and suicide
- Impact on family and social life.

The third section of the literature review explores potential solutions to some of these problems, both in theory and in practice. Some of the solutions include:

- Reduced or more flexible working hours

- Flexibility, family-friendly programs and the power of perception

- Supportive, consultative culture

- Physical health and psychological support

- Solutions related to specific age groups/life-phases

- A multi-faceted systems approach which aims to prevent the occurrence of illness by addressing the sources of stress in the workplace, and

- Cultural change.

The Industry Stakeholder Perspective

Stakeholder input reinforced, and in some instances provided deeper insight to, the themes raised previously by employers and employee respondents, particularly the impact of programming pressure and liquidated damages.

Supervisory levels are seen as a priority area for attention because of the convergence of personal wellbeing and their ability to directly influence the wellbeing of others on site. The cost of ill-health was seen as a key motivator to engage employers.

Although it was acknowledged that the plumbing and electrical trades had, to some extent, preemptively managed wellbeing issues through a cap on hours, fundamental problems still remained across the industry. Nonetheless, a clear sense of purpose emerged throughout discussions with stakeholders. Recognition was given to the fact that the culture change required to improve individual and company wellbeing could only be achieved through a shift in mindset and a collective effort.

In summary

The data collected in this project adds weight to the social and economic argument for wellbeing strategies, linking it with benefits for companies that include retention, reduced absenteeism and burnout, improved working relationships and morale, and increased productivity.

Unrealistic programming appears to be the root cause of work/life conflict in the Victorian commercial construction industry. The flow on pressure this causes impacts all aspects of project construction and people at all levels of the industry to varying degrees. The cultural features of construction including long hours, weekend work, confrontational work environments, and inadequate attention paid to developing human resource management skills, resourcing pressure and liquidated damages are having a negative impact on the wellbeing of individuals, companies and the industry.

What participants in this study contributed clearly points to the need for cultural / behaviour change at both the industry and company level.

Construction is undoubtedly a 'macho' environment where dealing with 'soft' management issues is not common practice. Communication skills and emotional intelligence are not well developed and this is impacting on working relationships. Lack of strategic HR thinking and practice is limiting the capacity of companies to effectively align workforce wellbeing with project outcomes.

Ideally, participants want their weekend protected so they can reclaim it for recovery, leisure and family. However, given both the commercial pressure that currently comes to bear on sites, and pressure to achieve income to maintain lifestyle expectations, they do not see a future where this is possible, unless changes are industry-wide. In this context, the initiative that is most highly valued at all levels is lockdown weekends. People were also seeking greater choice in relation to weekend work.

Ultimately, however, the question remains: should small adaptations to current arrangements be made or should a more 'gutsy' approach be taken that will holistically address the integrated cultural issues affecting physical and mental wellbeing? Evidence would suggest that the time has come to respond to a changed labour market and more competitive social and economic conditions. The industry should be driving cultural change to create a strong and sustainable future.

Employers will need to become facilitators, creating innovative ways to overcome obstacles and to attract the supply of labour available. The construction industry must challenge the existing culture and move toward a systematic approach in addressing the wellbeing of its employees. The benefits for workers are obvious: job and life satisfaction; a greater sense of control; less stress and better health. For the construction industry, the benefits are just as clear: improved attraction and retention of high performing staff; reduced staff turnover; reduced absenteeism and associated costs; and increased productivity. Aiming to effectively and proactively manage employee wellbeing needs to be part of regular business and embedded into an organisational culture.

Recommendations

The recommendations are presented in terms of stakeholder groups, making it clear with whom accountability lies. They are intended to create a blueprint appropriate initially for large and medium tier companies.

Government through the BICC

- Conduct cost benefit analysis that takes into account the local economic and industry specific work environment to compare current work patterns with suggested alternatives to help determine if the industry can afford to make the changes recommended by this report.

- Determine an approach to manage the implementation of the proposed blueprint.

- Raise awareness about the findings of this report through presentations to industry participants, key industry stakeholders and clients, and get buy-in to further explore industry culture change.

- Promote the findings of the report to the wider community and support industry stakeholders in seeking culture change to enhance wellbeing across the broader industry sector.

- Develop a model industry wellbeing charter - a set of wellbeing principles available to companies to assist them in developing a systematic approach to wellbeing.

- Further educate Government agencies where they act as clients to the construction industry to raise awareness of the findings of this Report and the strategic intent of Government's *Action Agenda for Work and Family Balance* that calls for a Whole-of-Victorian-Government approach to:

   o lead the way in work and family balance

   o support industry to adopt practices that enhance work and family balance

   o work with the community on work and family issues

- Consult widely to establish a programming formula for works in various categories e.g. simple, conventional and complex (such as a $100m hospital) in order to provide guidance to industry and clients so that they can implement findings of this Report to improve wellbeing

- Establish demonstration pilot projects to promote and trial work arrangements consistent with the findings of this Report and designed to enhance wellbeing for employees at all levels.

Employer Associations

- Raise awareness at senior level about the need to develop a more strategic approach to human resource management across the industry and promote its potential to add value to bottom line results.

Employer Association and Unions

- Lead the development of an accredited unit of competency tailored to frontline managers in the industry. This would be focused on managing people, with emphasis on wellbeing.

- Support this wellbeing training program with a set of resources that frontline managers can use on site.

- Establish a wellbeing awareness campaign targeting people at all levels in the industry to highlight the mutual benefit of a balanced life for individuals and companies. This should be developed to create consistent and collective, not competing, messages by drawing on expertise from a range of stakeholders, such as Incolink, Vic Health, WorkSafe, cBus and communication professionals.

Companies

- Acknowledge that unrealistic work demands are not sustainable over time and come at a cost to the organisation which is often not recognised or tracked.

- Use the findings of this report as the basis for a more detailed exploration of company specific work practices, cultural barriers and opportunities to improve individual wellbeing including identifying ways of reducing employee workloads particularly in line management roles.

- Speak with employees' partners for greater insight into the impact of work practices.

- Align human resource management and wellbeing to the business strategy.

- Determine wellbeing priorities at the company level.

- Document a plan of action to proactively manage wellbeing which incorporates the wellbeing charter and a systematic approach tailored to the needs of the business and its employee group.

1 PROJECT AIM

This research project was designed to inform the development of an industry wellbeing blueprint based on input from the sector.

The blueprint is intended to provide a simple outline for the Victorian construction sector, highlighting the interrelationship of roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders. To support this approach, the blueprint will identify the appropriate tools and support services that will be required to assist key stakeholders in implementing effective wellbeing policies and practices.

2 BACKGROUND – HOW DID THE PROJECT COME ABOUT?

In late 2006, the Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) endorsed a proposal, put to it by the Building Commissioner, to undertake research that would inform the development of a coordinated strategic framework for wellbeing in the workplace. This framework would identify the actions required of government, industry groups, unions, employers and individuals to effectively address wellbeing issues in the construction industry.

This decision resulted from discussions with industry stakeholders at a series of roundtables held at the Building Commission in 2006, all of which pointed to a collective concern for the physical and mental wellbeing of people, primarily men, in construction. Added impetus was given to this concern by local data presented in the *Workplace Stress in Victoria* Report conducted on behalf of Vic Health.

The findings of the Vic Health report revealed that individually focused, rather than holistic wellbeing/stress interventions are by far the most commonplace in Victorian workplaces. It is well known that such interventions deliver only limited value to organisations, yet evidence of existing systems approaches to wellbeing/stress was hard to find in any industry.

The Building Commission discussions held in 2006 indicated that for the construction industry, while there is a range of wellbeing interventions available from service providers such as Incolink and Cbus, full service cover is not provided to all employee groups. Furthermore, there was no evidence to suggest that the services were integrated into a strategic systems approach to managing wellbeing.

Before recommendations could be made about the creation of a systems approach, however, specific research was required in order to make a sound assessment of what was currently impacting on the wellbeing of individuals working in the building and construction sector in Victoria.

A presentation was made to the BICC in December 2006 and it was agreed that research should be undertaken to:

1. Conduct a 'stocktake' to get a clear picture of what is happening currently in primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions in local commercial building and construction companies.

2. Find out what specifically is impacting on the wellbeing of individuals at all levels in the industry.

3 THE BUILDING INDUSTRY CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL

The BICC is well-placed to support this research project. As an advisory group, established by the Victorian Government in 2001, it has representatives from client and employer groups, trade unions, individual employers and government.

The BICC aims to foster harmonious working relations, promote cultural change, facilitate investment and promote best practice in the Victorian building construction industry. It does this through a cooperative and collaborative approach with secretariat support provided by Industrial Relations Victoria.

As a tripartite forum, the BICC is unique within the building industry in Victoria. It provides the opportunity to carry debate to a strategic level and thus contributes positively to the future of the industry and Victoria's prosperity.

The BICC aims are:

- provide a high level forum for regular dialogue between the Government, employers and representative organisations, and unions on significant economic and industrial relations issues in the building industry;

- through consultation on key issues, foster a harmonious working environment in the Victorian building industry;

- promote cultural change in the industry, through examination of initiatives that will improve Victoria's construction productivity, reduce industrial disputation, enhance occupational health and safety, encourage skills development, and enhance employment security;

- promote and encourage initiatives that will facilitate investment into Victoria;

- encourage constructive dialogue about the effectiveness of industry structures to promote and achieve a best practice environment;

- provide advice to the Victorian Government on matters relevant to its role; and

- provide a forum that can co-ordinate and promote showcase projects that adopt best practice in the industry.

Council members:

Mr Bob Merriman AM	Chair
Mr Tony Arnel	Commissioner, Building Commission
Mr Brian Boyd	Secretary, Victorian Trades Hall Council
Ms Carmel Coate	Executive Director, National Fire Industry Association
Ms Jennifer Cunich	Executive Director, Property Council of Australia
Mr David Eynon	Executive Director, Air Conditioning and Mechanical Contractors' Association of Victoria
Mr Randell Fuller	Human Resources Manager, Multiplex Constructions Pty Ltd
Mr Phillip Green	Chief Executive Officer, National Electrical and Communications Association Victorian Chapter
Mr Ray Herbert	Executive Director, Master Plumbers and Mechanical Services Association of Australia
Mr Martin Kingham	State Secretary, CFMEU – Construction and General Division
Mr Dean Mighell	State Secretary, CEPU – Electrical Division
Mr Bernie Nolan	Construction Manager, Baulderstone Hornibrook
Mr Earl Setches	State Secretary, CEPU – Plumbing Division
Mr Sean Sweeney	Director, Major Projects Victoria
Mr John van Camp	National Industrial Relations Manager, Grocon
Mr Tommy Watson	Assistant Secretary, CFMEU – Construction and General Division
Mr Brian Welch	Executive Director, Master Builders Association of Victoria

A sub-committee of the BICC, chaired by Tony Arnel, Building and Plumbing Industry Commissioner, was established to focus on cultural change issues, including reinventing the image of the sector. This project is a component of that portfolio of work.

4 CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY PROFILE

According to ABS data:

- Construction is the fifth largest industry in Australia. As of August 2007 it employed 936,000 people (or 9 per cent of the total workforce).

- In Victoria (as of November 2007) the industry employed almost 220,000 workers. This represents a share of 23.3 per cent of total construction employment in Australia, and 8.5 per cent of total employment across all industries in Victoria.

- Males account for 88.5 per cent of industry employment. In 2007, females made up 11.4 per cent of the construction industry workforce, compared with the average of 44.9 per cent for all industries.

- The construction workforce is predominantly full-time. Less than one fifth (13.5 per cent) of the construction workforce was employed on a part-time basis, compared with the all industries average of 28.3 per cent.

- Mature age workers (45 years +) make up 37 per cent of the Victorian workforce.

5 DEFINITIONS

Work/life balance is a self-defined state of wellbeing achieved by an individual when they are able to effectively manage and integrate the varied responsibilities of work, home, family and community commitments, and personal leisure time. Successfully realised work/life balance is supportive of the physical and emotional health of the individual and their family. It also contributes to social and community cohesion.

The term 'workplace', as used throughout this report, is defined as the physical place of work, not the whole company.

The term 'wages staff' refers to employees paid on an hourly basis and covered by an Enterprise Bargaining Agreement. 'Salaried staff' refers to employees who are on individual contractual arrangements.

The terms systems/systematic approach to managing wellbeing refers to the integration of proactive prevention, ameliorative and reactive interventions.

6   METHODOLOGY

Research for this project tested whether the current reality in Victoria matched other research and anecdotal evidence. It was intentionally designed to present a 'human' case for change. It illustrates practices in the local industry with personal stories and, to a lesser extent, through data provided by a survey of 130 employees (salaried and wages). The decision to proceed in this way, rather than to seek the assistance of a tertiary institute, was based on difficulty in meeting the rigorous methodological criteria required by academics and also the preference to engage and explore issues with employees through anecdotes.

It was thus decided that two practitioners, both familiar with the local construction industry, would facilitate the data collection. Siusan MacKenzie, a consultant who specialises in work and life balance at the organisational level; and Louise Gartland, an Industrial Relations Victoria Policy Adviser with experience in managing IR issues in both the commercial construction and government environments. Assistance was provided by Dr Emma Curtin who prepared the Literature Review and Marie Crozier-Durham, a work/life practitioner.

The methodology used to inform this report was segmented into four parts:

Part one: An employer/organisational perspective gained through telephone interviews

Senior management representatives from each participating company were interviewed to determine how wellbeing issues are currently being identified and addressed at the organisational level for all employee groups.

A letter was sent to 17 construction companies and 14 sub-contractors inviting them to participate, firstly in the interview process, and secondly to provide access to employees to participate in discussion groups.

Issues explored during interviews included:

- What triggers the need for interventions to address symptoms of stress?
- What interventions are being used now – systems approach?
- Who is managing such issues?
- Where are they seeking help from?
- What service / tool gaps exist?

Part two: An employee perspective gained through a survey and group discussions

Employees (staff and wages) from across the industry were surveyed and a series of small group discussions were held to identify recurring issues, good practice and ideas to improve wellbeing across the sector.

Issues explored in the discussion groups included:

- What is impacting on their wellbeing – positive and negative impacts?
- What could or should be done to improve wellbeing by various stakeholders?
- Evidence of successful efforts to improve wellbeing.

Part three: A review of literature

A review of literature was conducted to examine workplace wellbeing policy and practice, both locally and internationally.

Part four: An industry stakeholder perspective through individual discussions.

Discussions were held with representatives from the following organisations:

- Incolink
- cBus
- NECA
- CFMEU
- CEPU
- MBAV
- WorkSafe

7   PROJECT SCOPE AND SAMPLE

The sample group for this project was restricted to major commercial construction companies and a selection of sub-contractors representing a range of trades working on major commercial sites around Melbourne.

The rationale behind focusing on this sector of the industry was the belief that issues identified during research in the largest organisations would no doubt also be evident in other sectors. Furthermore, it is argued, any resulting change through implementing recommendations in the largest companies would eventually filter through to other sectors.

Companies that responded to an invitation to participate in some aspect of the data collection included:

- Abigroup
- AESmith
- Australand
- Baulderstone
- Becton
- Bovis Lend Lease
- CDC Plumbing
- CLG Plumbing
- Coulson
- Decco
- Elecraft
- Grocon
- Higgins Coatings

- Hansen Yuncken
- Icon
- John Holland Group
- Kane
- Leighton
- LUSimon
- Multiplex
- Nicholson (based in Ballarat)
- Probuild
- Salta
- Schiavello
- Theiss

One hundred and twenty one full-time employees (119 male and 2 female) participated in nineteen discussion groups and completed surveys at the end of the sessions. One company issued the survey to its foremen without hosting a discussion group. All discussion group participants were selected at the discretion of the company contacts. Some companies provided groups in more than one job category.

The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented below. All but two of the participants were male.

Characteristics of the employee sample	Number
Age range	
16 - 25	20
26 - 35	46
36 - 45	32
46 - 55	28
56 - 65	3
66+	0
Current situation	
Never married	28
Married or not married but living with a partner	89
Separated	6
Divorced	4
Widowed	0
Make up of household	
Live alone	9
Live alone with partner	41
Live with partner and children all or some of the time	50
Live alone with children all or some of the time	0
Live with one or both parents	13
Live with one or more adults who are neither partner or parent	11

8   PROJECT LIMITATIONS

It is acknowledged that the research conducted had certain limitations. These include non-randomised selection of participants, lack of representation of women in the sample group and the inability to access people at all job levels in all participating organisations. Nonetheless, the emergence of strongly consistent themes throughout the research phases has, to a degree, negated these limiting factors. The researchers are confident that the findings of their data collection present a true depiction of the issues.

It must also be stated that while the review of literature made the point that evidence on the cost-benefits of work/life and wellbeing programs is increasingly clear and that leaders need to be convinced of this fact, such analysis was beyond the scope of this current project. A specific cost-benefit analysis to take into account the local economic and construction work environment would be highly beneficial and should certainly be considered for future research.

9   RESEARCH RESULTS

Employer Perspective

Gathering employer perspectives involved individual phone interviews lasting approximately 45 minutes each. Seventeen construction companies and eight sub-contractors were involved in this process. The interviews took place in the first half of 2007 and in all cases they were conducted with a Managing Director, or other executive team member, who was able to provide an organisational perspective.

A summary of interview findings is provided in the matrix below. This classifies employer identified workplace practices as primary, secondary or tertiary interventions using the definitions drawn from the Vic Health *Workplace Stress in Victoria* Report.[1]

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[1] ***Primary preventive interventions are proactive***, aiming to prevent the occurrence of illness among healthy individuals. These address sources of stress in the workplace, or stressors, through alterations in physical or psychosocial work environment, or through organizational changes. ***Secondary interventions are ameliorative***, aiming to modify an individual's response to stressors, targeting the individual with the underlying assumption that focusing on individuals' responses to stressors should be done in addition to—or in preference to—removing or reducing stressors. Finally, ***tertiary interventions are reactive***, aiming to minimise the effects of stress-related problems once they have occurred, through 'treatment' or management of symptoms or disease. See LaMontagne, A. D., Shaw, A., Ostry, A., Louie, A., & Keegel, T. (2006). *Workplace stress in Victoria: Developing a systems approach - Full report*. Melbourne: Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, p. 21.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

WELLBEING SNAPSHOT MATRIX				
Based on interviews with a senior representative at each company				
	Does the company have a HR Manager position?	**PRIMARY INTERVENTION** Primary interventions are proactive – they aim to prevent the occurrence of illness among healthy individuals. They address the source of stress in the workplace, or stressors through alterations in physical or psychosocial work environment, or through organisational change e.g. changes in work pacing and job redesign or giving people a say over rosters.	**SECONDARY INTERVENTION** Secondary interventions are ameliorative – they aim to modify an individual's response to stressors e.g. stress management programs for employees, massage and yoga.	**TERTIARY INTERVENTION** Tertiary interventions are reactive – they aim to minimise the effects of stress related problems once they have occurred e.g. counseling, return to work and other rehabilitation programs.
Sub contractor 1	No	• Proactive management – advocate a style of management with processes to 'head off' problems. • Make work a good place to be. • Culture that encourages people to let managers know if there are family/life issues going on e.g. family illness, renovating.	• Active early intervention - senior person involved in discussions with person to try and find cause of problems.	• Recommend medical help.
Sub contractor 2	No	• Major focus on morale - events that include the family. • In relation to wellbeing - clear expectation of managers to take proactive role. • Responsibilities spelt out - from foreman to senior management. • Safety manager has specific role. • Accessible information, such as availability of counseling and health advice -		• Referrals to Incolink. • Referrals to private counseling services.

		particularly re alcohol and drugs.		
Sub contractor 3	No	• Stress good communication and supervisor vigilance - resource allocation to reduce pressure. • Constant assessment of human resource requirements in order to alter resource allocation - reduce pressure and alter duty requirements. • Understand the importance of recovery time (RDOs in EBA and 10 x RDOs per year for management by negotiation). • Culture that emphasises personal responsibility and advises that long hours can lead to burnout. • Proactively provide information on stress, health and wellbeing resources.	• Direct individual staff who appear to need assistance to Information on stress, health and wellbeing resources.	
Sub contractor 4	No	• Senior Management responsibility.	• Active early intervention - senior person involved in discussions with person to try and find cause of the problem.	• Referrals to Incolink. • Referrals to private counseling services.
Sub contractor 5	No	• Culture of proactive management, and monitoring staff for signs of stress.	• Active early intervention - senior person involved in discussions with person to try and find cause of the problem.	
Sub contractor 6	No	• Prevention seen to be a management responsibility – get to know the whole person. • Senior management team actively discusses their own wellbeing issues.	• Active early intervention - senior person involved in discussions with person to try to find cause of the problem.	• Referrals to family counselor. • Referrals to Beyond Blue.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

Sub contractor 7	Yes	• Wellbeing seen to be a management goal linked to reward and recognition systems. • Culture of attention to wellbeing as part of project/resource allocation. • Strong attention to OH&S – wellbeing part of this.		• Referrals to private counseling services.
Sub contractor 8		• Proactive management - wellbeing a major management responsibility. • Empower all managers to take responsibility. • Focus on team support as strategy to prevent stress and burnout. • Culture of attention to wellbeing as part of project/resource allocation.	• Informal, flexible arrangements to facilitate individual coping when this need identified.	• Referral to private counseling services.
Company 1 No documented strategy / policy	No	• Family culture that cares about people. • Flexible approach to work hours in recognition of family structure and associated caring issues. • Find temporary replacements as needed, to enable people to attend events and appointments e.g. school events etc. • Good levels of resourcing to share load and 'head off' issues.	• Time off when needed to sort out problems e.g. relationship and family breakdowns.	• Referral to Incolink.
Company 2 No documented strategy / policy but closely aligned	Yes	• Managers empowered to manage team and trends e.g. absenteeism. • Actively discourage Sunday work. • Show interest in staff welfare through day to day management of people.	• Active early intervention - most senior person will have private chat. • Flexibility and provision for structured time out if required. • Allow leave with or without pay.	• Referrals to Incolink. • Referrals to private counseling services.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

to OHS		• Health check prior to starting job.		
Company 3 No documented strategy / policy	Yes	• Managers/supervisors alert for, and acting on, early warning signs.	• Support from management and HR as required.	• Employee Assistance Program.
Company 4 No documented strategy / policy	No	• Recognised the need for added resources to talk to staff as company grows. • Project manager responsible for looking after wellbeing of team – depends on intuition of manager. • Performance reviews - a forum where issues of work/life balance can be raised.	• Remedial masseur for management staff. • Active social committee.	• Referrals to Incolink.
Company 5 No documented strategy / policy	Yes	• Culture of 'family first' and encouraging talk. • Free health checks for all. • Culture that encourages people to let managers know if there are family/life issues going on - managed flexibly. • Culture of supporting/covering for mates in need. • Senior role models e.g. coaching kids sport.	• Active early intervention - senior person involved in discussions with person to try and find cause of the problem.	• Referrals to private counseling service for employees and family.
Company 6 No documented strategy but made some policy decisions to	Yes	• Policy to only tender on achievable programs. • Policy to roster Saturday work. • Provide flexible hours if requested. • Health checks for all staff. • Send managers on leadership courses	• Time off for recuperation. • Provision of courses through AIM & AIG. • Support from management and HR, as required.	• Referrals to Incolink. • Referrals to private counseling services.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

		such as LMA. • Proactive management – project managers on the lookout for symptoms. • Actively build strong team relationships e.g. project management teams go on overnight conference to build team and discuss issues, do Myers Briggs to understand relationships.		
Company 7 No documented strategy / policy but informal policies to address wellbeing integrated with OHS	Yes	• 'Family values' company with open door to talk and culture of family first. • Managers on the lookout for symptoms. • Encourage participation in school and family events. • Organise fun family functions. • Performance appraisals including discussion about work/life balance issues. • Health checks for senior management. • Saturday roster for management. • Management empathy to time off - relieve/avoid stress. • Realistic programming to manage stress. • No penalty for part day off.	• Brochures on signs of distress. • Information on OH&S rights. • Employee Assistance Program promoted.	• Referrals to Incolink . • Referrals to private counseling services.
Company 8 No documented strategy / policy but wellbeing integrated with OHS	Yes	• Aim for good project management structures. • Realistic programs. • Try to share workload as a team and thereby allow people to alternate Saturday work. • Raise awareness about stress as an OHS	• Provide ad hoc flexibility, as required.	

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

		• issue.		
		• Management roster for Saturdays.		
		• All staff have one Monday off a month to coincide with RDO.		
		• Spend a lot of time recruiting to ensure cultural fit to avoid stress.		
Company 9 No documented strategy / policy but wellbeing integrated with OHS	Yes	• Leadership programs to build competency e.g. effective listening to capture issues. • Proactive management - wellbeing a line management responsibility. • Site visits by senior people with no specific construction agenda on a fortnightly basis to capture issues. • Diverse project teams including someone to 'drive fun'. • Health checks for all.	• Personal development programs with opportunity for partner involvement e.g. wine appreciation, BBQ cooking. • Employee Assistance Program promoted. • Buddy system for apprentices.	
Company10 No documented strategy / policy but see connection to OHS	No but on the way	• Performance review program brings out work/life issues. • Very detailed monthly project management reports including critical assessment of HR. • Management KPIs for HR issues.	• Juggle team personalities and alter duty requirements, as required.	• On site counseling from manager.
Company 11 No documented strategy / policy	No	• Culture of discouraging 'presenteeism'. • Lead by example. • Try to foster flexible culture and be on the look out for 'problems' that cause pressure.	• Ad hoc flexibility to allow time off when problems arise.	• Referrals to Incolink a last resort.

Company12 No documented strategy / policy but see connection to OHS	Yes	• Work in small groups and provide flexibility in terms of when people have RDOs. • Mandate work/life discussions in performance reviews. • Roster Saturday work if possible. • Line manager responsibility for wellbeing.	• Option for packaged 12 weeks annual leave. • Employee Assistance Program promoted. • Relocate people to minimise stress.	
Company13 No documented strategy / policy	No	• Culture to be sensible about Saturday work – roster management where possible. • Give managers 10 RDOs a year. • Aim for realistic programming and resourcing. • Program of mentoring young staff. • Conscious of maintaining manageable workloads. Consider travel issues to cut down stress.		
Company14 No documented strategy / policy	Yes	• Provide access to senior management to raise issues. • Monitor annual leave. • Rotate Saturday work. • RDOs for management to take edge of excessive hours. • Creating 'reasonable hours' culture.	• Health and wellbeing project pilot.	• Use Employee Assistance Program reactively or specialist counselor.
Company15 No documented strategy / policy	No		• React when performance affected. • Lighten workloads as required. • Organise leave and temporary replacement - time to recover.	• Incolink.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

Company16 Documented strategy and policy	Yes	• Spend time recruiting to ensure cultural match of people. • Promote culture that cares. • Researched perception of issues with employees and partners. • Work/life balance program to proactively identify issues and change culture - 'okay to talk'. • Availability of flexible work arrangements. • Training and development for managers to manage work/life issues. • Saturday guidelines. • Line management responsibility with monthly KPI reports. • Performance appraisal includes section on work/life.	• Promote Mensline and Incolink. • Promote women's support service WIRE. • End of project time out rewards for managers and partners. • Health and wellbeing program pilot.	• Referrals to private counseling services, as required. • Referrals to Incolink.
Company17 No documented strategy / policy	Yes	• 'Look after' our people culture. • Employ to suit the culture. • Line management responsibility to nurture teamwork. • Training and development for line managers including team relationships. • Senior role models. • Roster staff if necessary to do Saturday work – aim not to work weekends. • Encourage exercise to manage stress. • Annual health checks for senior management.		• In house counseling if issues arise.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

Employer Perspective - Summary and Implications

Interviewed company representatives overwhelmingly considered people in the industry to be "more stressed these days" – especially at management levels. Pressure from work, it seems, comes primarily from 'unrealistic' tendering and programming, and the consequent long hours. As one participant said, *"We fight to win a job and then come back to the office and put our head in our hands and wonder how the hell we are ever going to achieve what we just agreed to. We know from day one it will be a nightmare."*

This was found to have a flow-on effect amongst sub-contractor employers. This group described how they had to cope with the consequences of others' decisions, often arbitrary, and the mountains of paper work and emails that resulted from everyone 'covering their butts' in an attempt to transfer liability.

From the employer perspective, this pressure is creating more and more work and life balance conflict and having a negative impact on the wellbeing of individuals in the industry. People are being increasingly drawn away from their families to cover the extended work hours necessary 'to just get the job done.'

However, employers were also generally of the view that regulated work hours relieve the workplace pressure for wages staff. They argue that pressure on wages staff comes more from the *personal* sphere, where high levels of debt to meet life style expectations are common. This translates to the ongoing need for overtime to sustain financial commitments. One employer commented - *"I get a feeling guys are living on the edge. I gave a guy the sack and found out he'd just signed a $350,000 mortgage."*

Employers consistently made the point that the affects of pressure on individuals are not always obvious – "Blokes tend to conceal issues until it gets pretty bad" and then the pressure reveals itself through absenteeism, reduced productivity, out of character behaviour and mental fragility.

Employer respondents participating in this study firmly acknowledged the increasing importance of work and life balance issues within the industry. The vast majority stated that *"employee wellbeing is absolutely a concern"*. However, translating this concern into effective, comprehensive workplace strategies was almost negligible in the evidence collected. Most companies described isolated wellbeing initiatives, primarily driven by a sense of goodwill towards employees. Yet policy frameworks were almost non-existent, or informal, with no alignment to a company strategy that recognised the reciprocal relationship between wellbeing and productivity.

Few respondents could express what Professor La Montagne, author of the Vic Health *Workplace Stress in Victoria* Report, describes as a systems approach – i.e. investigating and addressing the cause of the problem. While many respondents expressed a willingness to get to the root of problems as they emerged, they also acknowledged a lack of skill and expertise to manage wellbeing issues proactively and effectively. Some participants referred their wages staff to the services of Incolink when symptoms of pressure at work arose, but they recognised that this was often a reactive 'band-aid' response to situations that they did not feel competent to manage in the workplace. *"We are builders and project managers - we don't know about this sort of stuff"* was a sentiment repeated by numerous employers.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

It was generally perceived among respondents that responsibility for managing the wellbeing of staff rested with site managers (team leaders), but few had provided any appropriate training to help this group fulfill such a role. One participant commented that "it is really the luck of the draw if you are having problems at work – it all depends on the innate attitude of your line manager."

In addition to the effects of unrealistic programming, skill shortages also contributed to work and life balance issues affecting individuals and companies. Some people spoke of having to push staff into roles for which they were not fully competent. This often created a ripple effect of additional pressure for the individual, their subordinates, supervisors and families. Subcontractors talked about people being disinclined to take on managerial roles. The pressure at this level is so evident that people simply choose not to accept it - "A car and a few thousand dollars does not compensate any more for the sort of pressure a foreman can be under day in day out."

Addressing issues of work and life balance was often put in the context of making the workplace more attractive to a new generation of staff seen as demanding, confident and ambitious. It was a commonly held view that when it comes to recruiting, 'young kids' do the interviewing now because they have choices - *"They are not interested in a six day a week job. The company has to work hard sell itself to the kids."* However, while several respondents spoke about the desire to create a culture that supported wellbeing initiatives (to demonstrate their point of difference as an attractive workplace); they were often faced with managers who clung to the 'old school approach' to the work environment. A 'clash of cultures' was certainly evident in this respect.

The majority of respondents, but certainly not all, clearly recognised a link between wellbeing/work and life balance and OH&S issues. However, the interviews revealed an almost universal lack of understanding of the role of HR strategy and its potential value to company sustainability. Although employers accepted that it is hard and costly to replace employees in the current labour market, strategies to align company values, recruitment practices and ongoing wellbeing programs were not described. When this was explored specifically in relation to wellbeing, employers almost universally said they did not know how. There was one exception where a Director was able to describe a unique and systematic approach to employee wellbeing which involved research, training and development for site managers, and clear accountabilities for work and life balance measures.

> *"We are immensely proud of our work in this area, and the impact that it has had upon our people and on our business. It has, without doubt, enabled us to attract the very highest calibre of staff, a significant proportion of whom commented to us that, if it were not for the programme, they would have given other competitors more serious consideration.*
>
> *In an industry which is under stress, the programme has also enabled us to retain numerous key staff members, some of which advised us they were contemplating moving to a different industry (let alone another company!) until such time as they saw we were serious about our programme.*
>
> *Our Group carries (as a core business strategy) the need to grow in order to meet the career expectations of our people. We can, of course, only grow if we have the right*

people. Our programme has without doubt enabled us to not only attract key new staff members but, equally importantly, retain and develop existing staff members.

Although it is difficult to accurately quantify the benefits of this programme, when you consider savings on recruitment fees coupled with the well recorded costs of replacing existing staff members, the savings must be into the hundreds of thousands of dollars per annum."

Respondents generally believed that pressure will only be reduced through an industry-wide approach for all employees, empowered by the courage to address tendering and programming issues. One respondent commented - "The vast majority of people on my sites are not employed by me therefore we must have industry commonality including subbies."

Employee Perspective

Employee perspective was gained through a survey and a series of small group discussions with employees (staff and wages) from across the industry. Recurring issues, good practice and ideas to improve wellbeing across the sector were identified.

In order to maximise participation and respect sensitivities in relation to sharing information, the discussion groups were conducted at a time and place to suit each participating company, most often on site. These discussions took place between August and November 2007 and involved 19 groups in total, configured as follows:

Job category	Number of groups
Apprentice	2
Trades and labour	3
Foreman/Site Manager	3
Administrator	3
Construction/Project Manager	3
Graduate/junior staff	2
Sub-contractor management	1
Sub-contractor trades/labour	2
Total number of discussion group participants	**121**
Total number of survey respondents	**130**

To be interested in your own wellbeing requires pausing to reflect on what you feel. Very few men have a role model for this type of behaviour. Only one company in the sample had a formal process to proactively invite this sort of conversation to take place in the context of the work environment. Participation in a discussion group provided participants with the opportunity to stop and consider their situation. Immediate trust and rapport with the facilitators was established in every instance. Participants were advised that the discussion would contribute towards establishing a broad perspective of issues. Comments would not be attributed to either individuals or companies. This provided an unexpected opportunity for participants to let go of responsibilities and freely express beliefs and attitudes without any fear of retribution.

To establish immediate understanding of the sort of wellbeing issues we wanted participants to consider, a work/life 'bingo' card was provided against which they could make a self-assessment of their own circumstance. This proved to be an effective 'ice breaker' as people compared their issues and learnt more about each others' circumstances.

Discussion with employees provided a qualitative assessment of the construction work environment and its impact on wellbeing. The following issues were explored:

- Assessment of individual work/life balance

- The impact of working in the construction industry on individual wellbeing

- The cause and impact of pressure at work

- Employer programs to address wellbeing

- The cause of pressure from life away from work and the impact on work

- Suggestions for improvement at the workplace and industry level.

In making an assessment of individual work/life balance it is important to note that there is an over-riding sense of pride in construction work. To be able to say 'dad built that' is very important and satisfying. However, the pressure of working in the sector has had an increasing impact on people's lives in recent years. This is illustrated in the following table, which provides a brief summary of characteristics of each job category as gathered in group discussions.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

Job category	Characteristics of the group
Apprentice	Generally miserable. Fell like scapegoats. Keep their head down to minimise being seen as a troublemaker. Skills of their supervisor (technical and interpersonal) are critical in determining their wellbeing. Feel they have little control over hours because of perceived pressure to be available as required, even if they would prefer to be playing weekend sport.
Construction Labour	See themselves as a more easily replaced resource and are therefore very insecure. This translates to making themselves available as required, often for long hours. They too feel a lack of choice over working hours - only in an 'emergency' (wedding or funeral) would they request time off. Consequently, they do not have the time or energy to play sport or pursue other leisure activities. They value the EBA for the safety net conditions it provides in protecting their wellbeing.
Foreman/Site Manager	Very poor sense of wellbeing because of high levels of accountability and responsibility. Consistent response complaining about having no choice / control over hours primarily due to programming and lack of resources. This directly impacts on their ability to delegate to ease the pressure of their workload. They have received no skill development to help them manage their team, or indication it is a priority in their role. They feel they do not have the time to focus on the wellbeing of people they control.
Administrator	Less significant wellbeing issues because the job enables them to have some control over how they manage their work and hours of work. As a rule they do not work Saturdays, which enables them time to recover. They do, however, have great sympathy for their colleagues, who they see as constantly under pressure, dealing with unrealistic demands.
Construction/Project Manager	Personal experience plays a big part in determining their attitude and approach to management of their own wellbeing. Some have instigated a personal set of rules to survive. They have more choice and flexibility as to how they manage their time. In most cases they have received no HR skill development to assist them to develop and nurture their team. They can delegate but most often choose not to.
Graduate/Site Supervisor	Immediately aware of the impact of the job on their social and interpersonal relationships. Happy to conform at the outset to establish their career but anxious about how they will manage to sustain the hours and personal wellbeing long term.
Sub-contractor management	Fell like they are constantly chasing their tail to meet the demands of others' programming on the job – particularly arbitrary changes. The pressure of liquidated damages and transferring responsibility has led to a massive increase in pressure, paper work and confrontation on a daily basis.

Job category	Characteristics of the group
Sub-contractor trades	Feel more secure in their job as their skill is less easily duplicated. EBA conditions that cap their hours and provide regular RDOs play a big part in assisting them to manage their wellbeing. Often do not work Saturdays and have built this into their financial planning.

The cause of pressure in the construction industry and its impact on individual wellbeing

There was unanimous belief that the lives of people working in construction were not well balanced.

A number of interrelated factors were seen to contribute to this perceived lack of balance, driving long hours and high stress. These were:

- competitive tendering process
- under resourcing
- unrealistic timeframes for construction and procurement
- underperforming subcontractors (use of the cheapest option)
- liquidated damages
- poorly finished design documentation
- poorly trained managers
- perception that long hours is interpreted as high performance and loyalty

All of these factors were cited as leading to long and often unpredictable hours on the job, weekend work and constant pressure. During discussions, one employee highlighted the demands placed upon them, stating – *"I've had 16 missed calls while taking part in this discussion."*

Employees and employers shared the same perspective about the flow-on impact of the competitive tendering process and unrealistic programming, the key factors considered to be the root cause of work/life balance issues. Employees said:

> *"Liquidated damages are the single stupid thing that drives the stupid hours we work."*
>
> *"2% profit is not enough – who else would do it? The big guys get around it through diversification. It is killing the rest of us."*
>
> *"For eight years I worked six and a half days a week but I was never told I had to. I never had a sense of recovery. It was matter of survival."*

> "*Everyone is working longer hours. The difference for us is that it is always so confrontational – trying to get the better of someone else to maximise the return for our company.*"
>
> "*We have done this to ourselves because of the way we work with subcontractors.*"
>
> "*I've seen all-in brawls at work on this job – taking swings at each other – both under stress.*"

Wages staff are similarly affected. This group spoke of wanting the confidence to request time-off for reasons other than a wedding or a funeral; or to request a work arrangement that enables them to participate more fully in family life and not be afraid that it will be held against them when it comes to staffing the next job.

The long hours and ensuing exhaustion for people at all levels has led to a commonly held view concerning the impact on their personal lives. As one Melbourne worker noted, "*I have absolutely no energy or time to devote to other things I want to do.*" This was reflected in talk about giving up such things as leisure time, hobbies, socialising, golf, footy, health and dental checks. Another stated, "*I don't feel like going out. I have no energy. I am often angry and I am a hermit at home because I'm so tired.*" All of these factors can contribute to a poor sense of wellbeing.

In contrast, the majority of people who worked for a regional company were more likely to be involved in Saturday sport throughout the year. In part, this was as a consequence of community norms understood and appreciated by both employers and employees. Involvement in Saturday sport was valued as much for the individual benefit it provides, as for its role in connecting the community.

Personal health issues featured strongly in the discussions. Participants had experienced:

- waking up tired
- being mentally and physically exhausted
- constantly thinking about work
- feeling negative and flat
- head aches
- not eating properly
- not being able to shut off
- increased alcohol abuse
- low energy
- weight gain.

Most acknowledged feeling angry about the hours they had worked and the personal cost involved.

Impact on Family

Participants spoke of their time and energy being predominantly distributed between work and family. Some even made comments like *"I spend more time with the blokes at work than my wife."*

In some cases this had led to breakdown of relationships, even to the point at which employees felt more comfortable at work - *"Some people would rather be at work even if it is horrendous hours."* On the whole, however, people saw home as an escape – a clear boundary from work where they do not want to talk about work or have negative feelings about work pervading their private space and relationship with their partners. Many employees were of the view that their partner would not understand work stresses, and they did not want to relive the work argument at home. Others had difficulty switching off:

> *"I struggle to transform from an aggressive boss to a loving father when I walk in the door."*
>
> *"I can't switch my brain off work so I can't converse or engage with the family when I get home."*
>
> *"Everyone knows to leave me alone for half an hour after work."*
>
> *"The kids know by the way I shut the front door whether or not it is 'safe' to come out of their room."*

Limited time for leisure meant that people complained about not having adequate 'me' time (recognised as an important element of balance) - time to do whatever they wanted with no sense of pressure from either the work or family sphere. RDOs, where available, were often used and highly valued as an antidote to this situation - *"For me the RDO is a catch up. I couldn't handle life without it."*

However, people spoke of situations where workload meant that RDOs had to be worked. People hired on the understanding they would not work RDOs often found that they were called into meetings. This frequently made them very resentful. Lockdown weekends are therefore, in the current environment, the preferred option at all levels for the total predictability they provide.

> *"It was a good thing at the time (RDO's) – we knew we would have a day off but we need to reassess."*

In the majority of cases, people functioned in traditional 'breadwinner' family arrangements. Few participants spoke of partners having full-time careers outside the home and when they do, the couple had no dependent responsibilities. In some cases this arrangement was due

to personal values. More often it was out of necessity. The unsocial and unpredictable hours of construction work meant household management and parenting responsibilities became almost the sole responsibility of the partner at home. Consequently, household arrangements limited the opportunity for partners to work outside the home and to contribute to the household income. This was illustrated by the view that when someone is employed in construction they are effectively taking on paid employment for both themselves and their partner. The requirement / expectation of double the income arose as a consequence.

Not surprisingly, the impact of work on family focused heavily in all discussions. People said that their lives are 'out of kilter' with family and friends. This has a detrimental affect on relationships with various ramifications:

> *"Family too often tip toeing around you."*
>
> *"[kids asking] who the hell is he?"*
>
> *"Just about every foreman who works for us is divorced."*

Most people talked about getting a hard time from their wife or girlfriend for "not being there". Having to be in bed early for the 7am start and often long commute, and not having the energy to go out and socialise was also an issue, as was no time or energy for sex. One husband and father stated:

> *"The impact (of long hours) on my kids is that they have mum at home so they get plenty of support but it will be interesting to see what happens when the kids leave home. I am expecting my wife to feel very dissatisfied and lost (because she will have no kids and no career)."*

Another father attributed his absence in his daughter's life to the reason she rarely talked to him now that she was a teenager. She always referred instead to her mother. Driving his younger son to music lessons had consequently become a big priority. In contrast he had never attended his daughter's netball games and she often used it against him with taunts like, "what would you know dad? You were never there". In anticipating this sort of consequences a foreman told how he and his partner decided not to have kids.

There was a clear sense that lost time with kids could never be made up. A few senior managers expressed how they appreciate the need for guys to have time with their kids, based on their own experience. One stated:

> *"I don't get to see my daughter. I miss out on what she learns and get it all secondhand. Practically as soon as I wake up the phone starts ringing and it continues all the way home – I am mentally drained when I walk in the door."*

> *"When you get asked, are you home tomorrow (Saturday)? It tugs at your heart."*

One divorced father had put in place rigid start and finish times due to court orders around access. Ironically, because he was 'forced' to maintain this arrangement without exception, he saw his children more than prior to separation from his wife. Other single fathers face different issues and one told how on access weekends he had to leave his young children with older siblings because of the requirement to work on Saturdays.

Sadly, a foremen with young children told how he couldn't remember the last time he had tea with his kids, and had never seen his son play basketball in the 2 years he had been playing – he had heard he was good.

> *"My kids just want me to do the things other dads do."*

For single people, personal administration and maintenance were seen as major issues. Keeping the house clean, managing to cook and shop for yourself and exercise were all things that got pushed aside as a consequence of long hours and exhaustion. *"You neglect things like I haven't been to the dentist or doctor in years unless it is an emergency."*

Many young people reflected back on being warned at university about the long hours in construction and so they are generally accepting of the need to 'put in' during the week. For them, Saturday work is the biggest work and life balance problem.

> *"I had to stop playing soccer completely – it was just impossible with Saturday work."*

> *"Lock down weekends are the best because you get a real weekend."*

Apprentices in construction companies were particularly disgruntled about their work/life balance. They described issues with supervisors who made their job unnecessarily hard by not communicating properly and not sincerely demonstrating interest in their development or wellbeing. They felt under constant pressure to prove themselves but were often bewildered by lack of direction from *"foremen too busy for that"* and lack of understanding from older managers that *"we are young and want to have a life"*. One remarked - "*The old guys are like drill sergeants – back in my day – well bugger those days."*

Apprentices described feeling increasingly isolated from friends because of the requirement to work six days and the inability to socialise. For example, one spoke of not being able to enjoy going to a 21st birthday party on a Friday night because of feeling *"too wrecked"* on Saturday. They looked on with envy at apprentices working directly with skilled subcontractor tradesmen whom they felt were better equipped to transfer knowledge. In some cases they were supervised by foremen coming *"out of uni"* and they felt pulled between their trade

discipline and that of the foreman role. For some a regular 'sickie' was a way of coping with the mental fatigue.

No stage of the life cycle was exempt from the negative impact of prevalent environmental factors described by employees. Young or old, the stories about the personal cost of working in construction were poignant.

Management and Cultural Issues

Employers spoke, often quite proudly, of initiatives they had implemented in an attempt to address emerging wellbeing issues. Yet, these were generally not well recognised by employees as being either widely available or effective. Like employers they perceived any response to wellbeing issues arising in the workplace as reactive rather than proactive, and often too late. Although there was a great sense of mate-ship, it seemed in most cases that participants perceived that no one was on the lookout, or attuned to the signs and symptoms of stress. One participant stated:

> *"We've had people go walk about before the end of the job and that is costly to humans and the company. One manager who just went to the bank – closed off and went walk about – didn't tell anyone – just went fishing."*

A group of construction managers said that although sites are open on Saturday and foremen/site managers are expected to work six days, they can feel free to put their hand up for time off and expect the team to cover. However, we got a sense from foremen that this was unlikely to occur as they carried such a huge sense of responsibility. They were reluctant to delegate in almost any situation. *"We are not expected to work every weekend but we have to because of the workload."* The fact that this comes at a cost to the company is starting to be recognised.

Unrealistic attitudes from senior management definitely contribute to stress down the line. Labourers and subcontractors talked about the relationship with foreman as being fundamental to success – *"to make a happy workplace and therefore get some give and take happening"*. But, they said, *"Foremen are usually angry blokes. They have been brought up to be like this. They see themselves as wardens."* The point was also made that many foreman have progressed through the ranks of a trade and although technically competent they often lack the necessary interpersonal skills to effectively manage a team to maximise performance/productivity. Their stress becomes contagious:

> *"I felt like I'd been dropped in at the deep end having to control blokes"*

> *"If the philosophy of the company is to beat everyone over the head it will pass down, if the foreman has poor people skills it soon turns to shit."*

One man illustrated this by describing how resentful he felt when, after being off work for three weeks with an injury, his boss walked past and never acknowledged the incident or his existence.

However, once again there was a contrast when talking with people at the regional company. They described putting more effort into relationships on the job because of the reputation implications for a company and individuals of *"living in the town after work"*. This also meant that the work environment was not as aggressive or confrontational as large Melbourne sites were perceived to be.

What people are looking for in a 'great employer' is someone who shows them respect as an individual. That means creating the sort of relationships amongst teams in which people feel comfortable to express concern about individual and team wellbeing issues. A great workplace was described as one *"Where we all get on well – everyone interested in each other – care about each other – their safety at work and their life at home – care if their kids or wife are sick."*

Of all the people we spoke with only one person said categorically they had a great employer. When asked to explain what made them so great it was attributed to a range of little things they did to acknowledge people for their contribution, *"make people feel valued and not just a number."*

It seems that people are looking for a release valve – an opportunity to talk about wellbeing issues. One group of participants discussed culture change at their company, and referred to a slogan: *"work and life balance... it is okay to talk about it"*, which gave them both confidence and access to a process to talk about issues. In another company, construction managers said they encourage managers down the line to have daily chats to get to know staff. Individual managers drew on their personal experience and emotional intelligence to start to address wellbeing related issues. For example, one site manager spoke of the attitude that it is not "manly" to talk about stress and how he "breaks the ice" by telling stories about himself. When one worker was having trouble with his wife, *"I told him to do something unexpected for her like make breaky and he came back and told me it had a huge impact."*

However, these appear to be isolated management approaches, not broadly practiced - *"Some companies are driven by legal responsibilities but wellbeing needs to be a philosophy."*

People talked about searching for a company that would provide better work and life balance options, even if it meant taking a cut in salary. Few spoke of looking outside the industry because construction is all they know and as a job it is satisfying because of the end product. One manager who had recently joined a new employer commented, *"Work/life balance is better here. Some companies expect staff in on Saturdays. Not here, and that makes a huge difference."*

Construction managers at one company explained strategies they used to ease the pressure:

> "The way we design our work helps. We (construction managers) run just one site now. And we have started to say no instead of yes and taken the view it is better to do two jobs well than four poorly. We opened our eyes to the pressure people were under and there is an unwritten understanding that people are the company. However as much as our Directors stress sensible culture and balance they are not good role models."

At the most senior level individuals have much greater opportunity to exercise some control over their work arrangements and this has a positive impact on their wellbeing.

> "I put family duties in the diary and treat it like an appointment. Started doing that because the family requested it and I found the world (at work) didn't fall apart."
>
> "I won't work weekends. Twelve hours Monday to Friday is enough except in a real emergency."
>
> "I had a sick child which was a reality check so it is easier to take control and prioritise now."

In some cases, however, they do not apply solutions to effectively address the problem. One participant said, "I try and avoid Saturdays – but then I usually come in on Sundays when it is quieter and no one calls."

The first reaction from people in every discussion group was that they wanted their weekends back. Waged employees often followed this by saying it had to be with minimal salary impact. Most participants were sceptical about how this could be achieved in the current environment.

> "We need to normalise work hours - weekends are weekends - no project is that important that it risks destroying your family relationships and your health. We have to get back in sync with our families."

On the whole, participants were found to be deeply entrenched in the existing construction culture and work arrangements. While they could certainly identify problems they had difficulty making suggestions 'outside the box' that they thought would be feasible beyond providing greater choice over weekend work.

Improving the Industry

The fact that people were asked to participate in this research project made them feel that the industry was looking for better work/life balance. This was broadly applauded and people expressed an interest in learning about the outcome of the project.

Banning Saturday work industry wide was seen as highly desirable but acknowledged as complex.

> *"Get rid of Saturday – so people don't have to rely on Saturday work."*

Participants expressed strong views on RDOs and two schools of thought were revealed. For some, managers in particular, Mondays were seen to be limited by the fact that this was not family time. For others, Monday provided necessary 'me time' and the ability to participate in the day to day routine of family life such as taking children to school, kinder and after school activities. Banking of RDOs was seen to defeat the purpose of providing a regular break and opportunity for recovery.

The option of changing RDOs to Saturday as a means of regaining weekends was consistently rejected. People were wary of employers under pressure soon resorting to the use of Saturday as catch up time. When requested to work on a Saturday RDO, employees said they would feel obliged, and in doing so, would lose the benefit of an RDO and be left with less recovery time than they now had.

The cap on hours for wage earners, in particular the plumbing and electrical trades, was seen as an effective strategy in helping manage wellbeing. It is perceived as a safety valve not available for managers to access personally.

The attitude of employees in the nineteen discussion groups is probably best summed up by the comment of one participant, *"It's time we all said enough's enough."*

Survey

The findings gathered from discussion groups were reinforced by the conduct of a survey of participants.

The survey provided a quantitative assessment of key work/life balance issues, namely:

- Conflict direction impact of work on personal life and personal life issues on work
- Satisfaction with hours of work
- Satisfaction with workplace flexibility
- Satisfaction with current level of work/life balance
- Impact of work/life imbalance on wellbeing and work performance
- Stress
- Age and life stage
- Relationship and living arrangement status.

The survey sample contained an almost 50/50 split between respondents under and over the age of 35. As age, life stage, relationship, family and living arrangements are significant determinants of work/life balance issues, this split provides a useful lens for examining the data.

A detailed statistical analysis displayed data in relation to all respondents, both those aged under and over 35. It illustrates a significant difference between the age groups.

These findings augment and inform the analysis of other data sources in the project.

One hundred and thirty-one survey responses were received. This includes all focus group participants (n=121) and an additional 10 men from a site that did not participate in the focus group process.

The results indicated the following age profile of the sample:

16% in 16- 25 years age group

36% in 26-35 years age group

25% in 35-35 years age group

25% in 46-55 years age group

2% in 56-65 years age group.

Relationship and Living Arrangement Status of Respondents

Two questions on the survey addressed the relationship and living arrangement status of the respondents. Question 9 asked, "*Who lives in your household ?*" and Question 10 asked about relationship status - "*Which best describes your current situation?*", inviting selection from the following categories:

- Never married

- Married or not married but living with a partner

- Separated

- Divorced

- Widowed.

In relation to the living arrangements of the sample, amongst all respondents, 31% were living with a partner, 44% were living with a partner and more than one child (all or some of the time), and 10 % were living with one or both parents.

The over 35 group were predominantly living with a partner (25%), or living with a partner and more than one child (all or some of the time) (66%). Indicative of the variety of life stages in the younger group, 37% reported living with a partner, 22% living with a partner and more than one child (all or some of the time), 19% living with one or both parents and 15% living with one or more adults who were neither their partner nor their parent.

An examination of relationship status revealed that 70% of the total sample selected the item *Married or not married but living with a partner* and 22% were never married. Given

anecdotal evidence regarding relationship breakdowns, the 5% separated and 3% divorced were surprisingly low.

Scope and Direction of Work/Life Pressure

Attention is paid in work/life research to bi-directional conflict or spillover – work to personal life conflict and personal life to work conflict. Time for rest and recovery and energy levels are increasingly the subject of work/life investigation. In the survey used for this project, Question 1 explores incidences of work to personal life conflict and Question 3 explores personal life to work conflict over the past six months, using a frequency test. Question 2 rates work to personal life interference intensity by asking respondents to select *Minimal, Moderate, Severe, or Very Severe* in response to the statement – "*During the past six months I would rate the interference with my personal life as...*"

Responses to items in Question 1 reveal that in the sample as a whole, 61% report coming home from work too tired to do some of the things they wanted to do *Often* or *Most of the Time*. This rate is similar for both the over 35 group (63%) and the younger group (59%).

In the older group, 43% reported that they did not have the energy to do things with the family or other important people in their life *Often* or *Most of the Time*. In addition, 47% agreed that the amount of time their job took up made it difficult to fulfill personal responsibilities. Significantly, 43% of the younger group and 48% of the older group reported not having enough time to participate in non-work activities that they found relaxing and enjoyable *Often* or *Most of the Time*.

Question 2 asked respondents to rate the interference of their job with their personal life during the past six months. Table 1 below presents a summary of responses.

Table 1: Summary of results from Question 2

	Minimal	Moderate	Severe	Very Severe
All responses	21%	52%	23%	4%
Over 35	17%	59%	21%	3%
Under 35	24%	45%	26%	5%

Question 3 largely explored the impact of personal life issues on work. Results indicated that there was very little negative spillover from personal life to work. On the contrary, 32% of the total sample (similar responses in both groups) reported often making personal sacrifices to get work done.

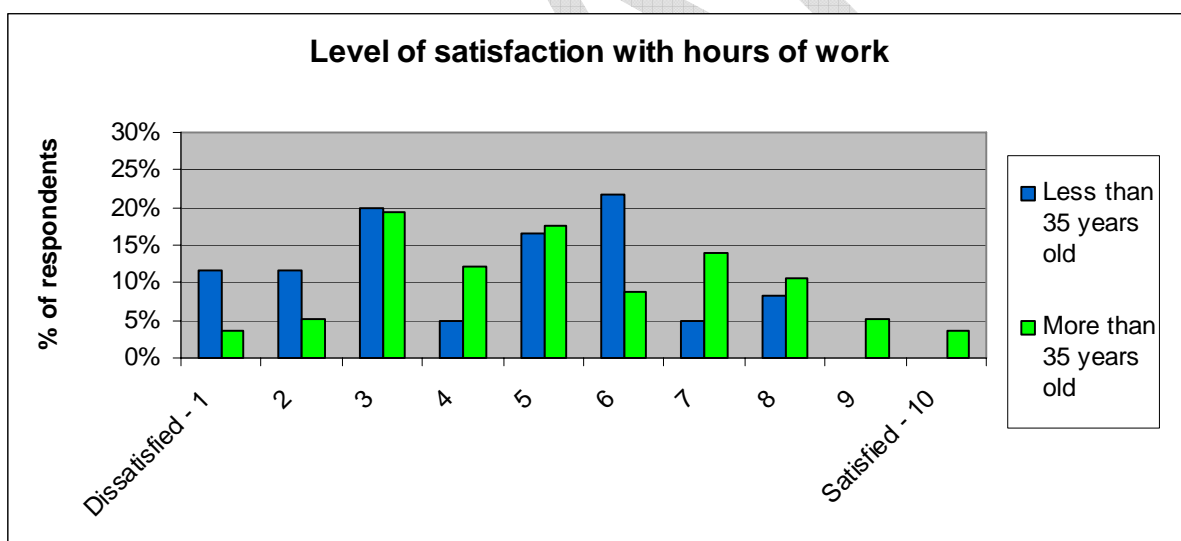## Satisfaction with Work hours, Flexibility and Work/Life Balance

Question 4 explored three central dimensions of work/life balance - satisfaction with work hours; the flexibility afforded in the workplace; and capacity to balance work and personal life.
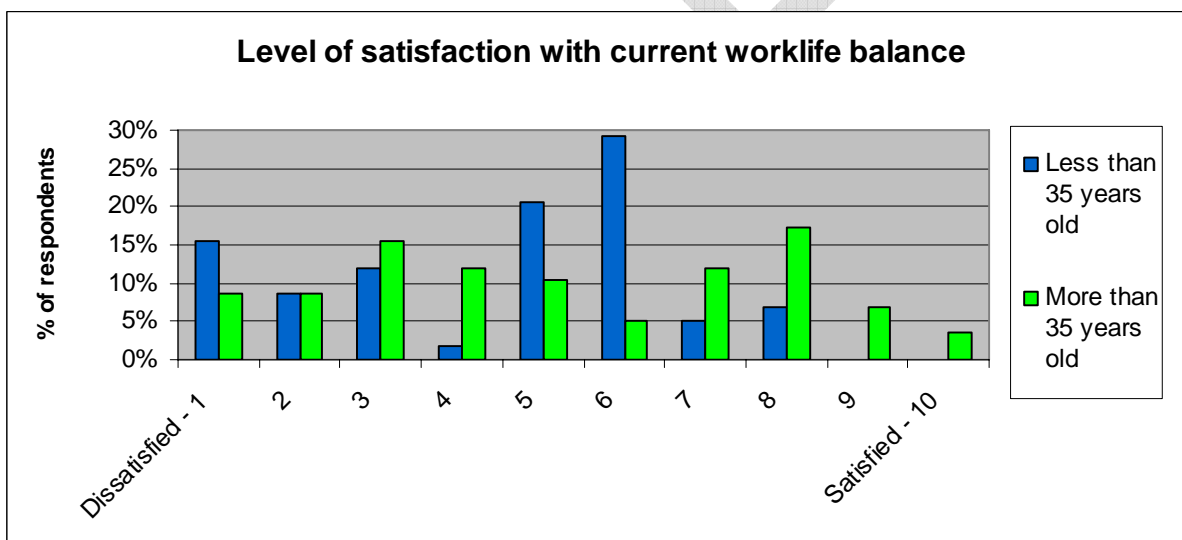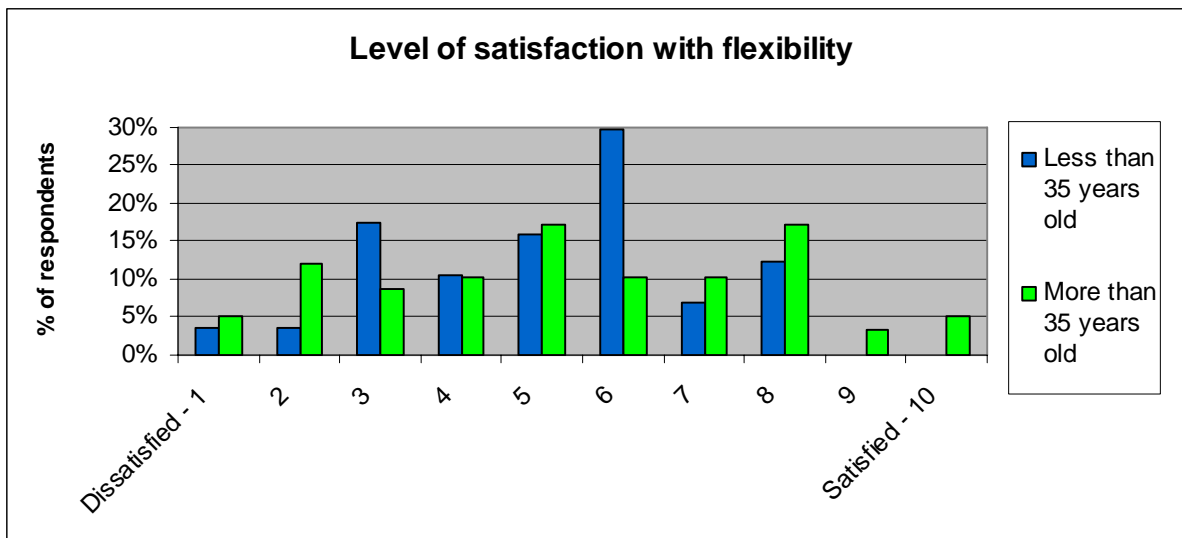
Given the same respondents closely aligned hours and satisfaction with work and life balance in the discussion groups there may have been some uncertainty as to how to answer the question when the three elements of hours, flexibility and work/life balance were separated out. Nevertheless this question quantifies the dissatisfaction with work/life balance and hours raised in all discussion groups.

What is highlighted by this question is that 49% of all respondents (a score of 5 or less) are currently dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with their work/life balance and similarly 52% are dissatisfied with the hours they work each week.

When the age cohorts are further segregated it is evident that dissatisfaction is noticeably higher amongst the younger group on all three indicators which presents a significant risk in terms of burn out and retention.

Because respondents are drawn from a range of companies it is impossible to account for the impact of specific cultural differences.

Level of satisfaction with hours of work

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

Level of satisfaction with flexibility

Level of satisfaction with current worklife balance

Work/Personal Life Interference and Impact on Wellbeing and Work Performance

Question 5 sought a personal assessment of work/personal life interference and impact on personal wellbeing and work performance. Overall, responses to the items in this question were clustered in the *Minimal Negative Effect* and *Moderate Negative Effect* boxes. An exception was the issue of impact on the ability to participate in hobbies and leisure activities (rated *Severe Negative Effect* or *Very Severe Negative Effect* - by 36% of the Over 35 group and 33% by the Under 35 group). The impact on *getting enough sleep* and *taking care of personal fitness,* also featured as issues for the younger group.

Stress

Question 6 asked *"What is the main source of stress in your life at this time?"* A small number of respondents indicated that they did not experience any stress, and a high proportion of respondents identified at least one source of stress. By far, the major themes identified were work pressure and relationship/family conflicts and worries. Three other significant themes were: finance, health, and sleeping problems. Work pressure stressors typically related to workloads and deadlines. Issues to do with partner conflict, concerns about children's wellbeing and lack of time to attend to family, and relationship matters typified the comments placed under the umbrella - *Relationship/family conflict and worries*.

Responses to Question 7 – "*Who have you talked to about feeling stressed?"* revealed that respondents turned to partners (45% of all responses) and mates (24% of all responses) when feeling stressed. Thirty-two percent of the Under 35 group nominated a parent as their support in this area. Twenty-eight percent of the total sample and 41% of the Over 35 group ticked *No-one*, despite the fact that most respondents nominated a number of sources of stress in Question 6. The implications of talking to no-one about these stressors cannot go unnoticed.

Employee Perspective - Summary and Implications

The discussion with employees and their responses to the survey provide an indication that these men find work/life balance issues challenging, particularly in relation to balancing work pressures – hours of work, work intensity and workload - with family, relationship and lifestyle commitments. While the complexity of contemporary family and social life and its pressures on these men is best glimpsed in the open question (Question 6), the survey also indicates that work has a greater spillover to personal life than the other way around. That section of the survey also points to the importance of men having time to nurture relationships (and to form them, particularly for some younger men). It is the partners, parents and mates who provide support and counsel – not the employers, although they are best placed to make a positive difference to reduce the pressure of work/life conflict.

Discussion with employees pointed to the need for managers to improve their communication skills and understanding of their important role in *'making or breaking'* the wellbeing of individuals under their control. Where managers 'break the ice' in terms of making it okay to talk about mental and physical wellbeing issues, they were rewarded with very positive feedback. In the same vein, employers who demonstrated respect for their employee group as individuals were rewarded with heightened morale and productivity.

While employees put effort into work commitments and family and personal relationships, their lives could benefit from more time for leisure, recovery and fun. This is a particularly important consideration in attracting and keeping young talent. The lower levels of satisfaction with work hours, flexibility and work/life balance in the younger cohort suggest that these are areas that require attention at the industry level.

The goal of work/life balance is becoming an increasingly important priority to employees at all levels when making career choices; prospective employees are seeking companies that will acknowledge and support their various commitments outside of work. The arrival of lifestyle centred 'Generation Y' into the workforce, and the aging construction workforce is

adding weight to the demand for integrated wellbeing strategies, including more flexible work practices and greater opportunity to achieve a balanced life.

The discussion groups and the survey both point to excessive workloads and overly long hours as not compatible with employee wellbeing. These have been linked with high levels of stress, deteriorated personal relationships and physical health. Working long hours has long been associated, in theory, with increased productivity. The reality, however, may be quite different. It is perhaps timely that employers now begin to assess the real impact of long hours on output and efficiency.

More importantly, it cannot be denied that the employees participating in this project have been ingrained in a culture from which they cannot seem to escape. This culture needs to be overhauled and innovative approaches applauded if the industry is to survive and attract new recruits.

Interestingly employees were of the view that when forced to think about changes to the design of work and work arrangements *"to manage programs not including Saturdays to give everyone a real weekend"* the highly competitive nature of the industry was likely to bring out innovative thoughts.

Stakeholder Perspective

Stakeholder input reinforced, and in some instances provided deeper insight to, the themes raised previously by employers and employee respondents, particularly the impact of programming pressure and liquidated damages.

To date Incolink and cBus[2] have combined forces to proactively promote health related messages relevant to men, through campaigns such as calendars and prostate cancer brochures. Cbus' interest in promoting such issues stemmed from a rise in industry suicide figures nationwide. Seeing itself as *"more than just a super fund"* cBus is keen to promote good practice on sites and be involved in promoting wellbeing. It is acknowledged, however, that they are not the professional experts in these matters. They are mindful that initiatives need to be coordinated for best effect, and consider their coordinators, who regularly visit sites, well placed in helping to convey key wellbeing messages.

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[2] Incolink offers a wide range of support and counseling services for members, including personal counseling, financial rights counseling, alcohol and drug program, apprentice support and problem gambling education. Incolink membership is available to employers and employees in the Victorian construction industry and the Victorian Metal construction/contracting, engineering construction/contracting and labour hire industries. Employer membership is voluntary. Incolink is the trading name of the Redundancy Payment Central Fund Limited. It is a trustee company established by unions and employers in the Victorian building industry in 1989 to administer industry funds. Incolink's primary function is to make redundancy payments to members who are unemployed construction workers and provide a range of insurance covers. Employer contributions provide each worker with benefits payments should they become unemployed. Cbus is an industry superannuation fund that originated in the construction, building and allied industries. It is also a 'public offer' fund, able to offer membership to anyone working in any occupation or industry. The fund has more than 513,300 members and more than 61,000 participating employers as at 30 September 2007.

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

Incolink's primary role is as a counseling service. It estimates that approximately 10,000 individuals per annum access services; however some may access the services on multiple occasions. Representatives of the organisation provided numerous stories to demonstrate the safety net they provide to construction employees and their families.

One example was provided of a young couple in crisis who had been referred to Incolink through the union. Relationship issues between the couple had been complicated by credit card debt, a hefty mortgage on a new home, a new baby, post-natal depression, and long commute to work. The advice Incolink was able to offer, particularly in relation to bankruptcy, helped lift one huge weight from their shoulders.

The problem of suicide in the construction industry was often raised in conversation with the stakeholders. The following observation encapsulates the tragic consequences of a 'macho' culture in which people feel they have no access to raise personal issues:

> *"I cannot understand how someone has the guts to put a rope around their neck but not the guts to talk to someone. The last funeral I went to had probably 500 people there – surely there was someone he could have talked to."*

The area of financial planning is of particular concern to Incolink's counselors as they repeatedly help people deal with the effect of *"incredible consumer pressure"* and "*keeping up with the Joneses"* as many employees rely on overtime and allowances to meet their lifestyle expectations.

Most referrals to Incolink are made by unions. It is rare for them to receive an approach from an employer unless it is a smaller employer who is close to his workers. In such cases, counselors have observed that managers are looking for help because they do not have the HR skills or the time *"to be dealing with this stuff"*.

Counselors see construction as a harsh environment for anyone with non-work issues. Their clients speak of not feeling able to take time out to connect with some support. They find it difficult to even ask due to the risk of being refused or jeopardising their employment.

One man who eventually made his way to Incolink described being told to *"stay at work and deal with it in your own time"* when he was devastated by a relationship breakdown. According to Incolink, despite their efforts, people still do not know where to go for support.

When counselors do get involved they often find people give sanitised responses to the 'boss' so employers do not know the depth or intensity of the pressure employees are experiencing. This 'gap' in understanding between employers and employees was illustrated throughout the course of this research project.

Another wellbeing issue raised by counselors related to work that required people to live away from home. In their experience, such isolation often led to alcohol and drug abuse, and problem gambling. Isolation for apprentices from the country was also highlighted as a problem. Weekend work meant that they had inadequate time to travel home, often leaving them lonely, depressed and dislocated from their peer group.

To address the sort of complex wellbeing issues counselors' deal with on a daily basis, Incolink representatives believed that employers need to be more proactive and 'sensitive'. However, they acknowledged how difficult this would be given the nature of the construction industry culture where the typical attitude to problems is to *'get rid of it'.* Being more proactive in terms of wellbeing involved asking people to be more sensitive and to see their workforce as individuals, not as a homogenous group. Incolink counselors firmly believed in a risk management approach to identify people in crisis at work.

Coinciding with this project, WorkSafe hosted a wellbeing forum as part of Workplace Health and Safety Week, targeting the construction industry. Their interest in wellbeing relates to the need to reduce Workcover claims, most of which show up as manual handling but are believed to often stem from stress related issues. The aim of the forum was to raise awareness about the interrelationship of wellbeing issues. This led to discussion in various circles that WorkSafe's role as the OHS regulator is likely to limit their ability to lead work in this area. The wellbeing paradigm, which is built on respect for the whole person, goes beyond the laws that WorkSafe regulate and integrates the boundaries between work and home.

In a similar way to cBus, WorkSafe is looking to define its role and contribution towards a cooperative approach to wellbeing for the industry. They see their most likely key contribution to be in the area of occupation specific health checks.

Union representatives were very pragmatic in their view that, while time is the only point of difference a company can compete on, it will be difficult to give people back their weekend.

One union official spoke of 30-40 mates/acquaintances who had committed suicide over the course of his career and he understood all but one was over a marriage or relationship breakdown. He was not the only person to talk about pressure of time at work as being particularly bad in regard to relationships - *"The industry might deliver on time to meet the demands of clients but it is at the expense of people."*

Union officials placed great importance on the calendar they had negotiated.

> *"The only work and life balance is the lockdown weekends and our membership base their life around those with predictability."*

A cap on hours for plumbers was described as originally raised to create employment *"because some people had heaps of work and others had none".* Capping hours was instigated as a solution to share the opportunity for employment. However, representatives now believe that it provides many other originally unintended wellbeing benefits, including opportunity for leisure, family participation, reduced absenteeism and less reliance on overtime money:

> *"We are seen as lucky because we are not running around like headless chooks. We have more time for recovery and people can plan."*
>
> *"People don't take anywhere near the sick days they used to. In the old days if I had an appointment I needed to take the day off. Now I get it for next Monday."*

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

> *"[capped hours are] a wonderful thing. Who wants to work 12 hours a day six or even seven days a week? Who wants to mow the lawns after they get home from that?"*
>
> *"The odd request for an extension is not rejected if they have a valid reason, like street closure. We take a flexible attitude."*

It is interesting to note, however, that the cap on hours for plumbers is sometimes used to benefit a range of people on a project. For example, *"Some subbies hide behind it if a client or contractor wants them to work and they don't want to so they come to us for an overtime ban."* But it has also been used by construction managers on site who say to plumbers *"hey listen, if you guys don't work then we won't have to either."*

The electrical trades have operated with a cap on hours for some time and from their perspective it has had no detrimental affect on productivity. Flexible attitudes on site will always allow critical work to be done. Being able to define what is critical in the context of programming is fundamental to managing individual wellbeing. The ETU is seen as having consistently used terms like "work and family balance" and, through the cap on hours, helped individuals question the real long-term impact of chasing hours and dollars.

Pressure associated with supervisory roles has also been a problem for NECA members as people are reluctant to lose RDO's and leisure time so some contractors are offering time for leisure time as an incentive to get people into these roles.

The trend towards design and construct which is seen to make programming very difficult was also raised as a factor contributing to stress for subbies.

Although both electrical and plumbing representatives spoke of young people seeing their trades as *'sexy again'* because of the possibility of running their own business, they recognised the need to attract the really good recruits. They had concerns that if the broader construction industry continues to be seen as six days a week and *'grotty'* then industry recruiting will be a problem.

Employer associations, like their membership, have come to terms with the fact that wellbeing is an important industry issue. They understand that no one size solution fits all and firmly believe that quality conversation at the company level is a fundamental starting point. They also argued that Government, as a client, must lead by example.

Associations appreciate the need to make wellbeing an issue at every level by working in unison with unions. Supervisory levels are seen as a priority area for attention because of the convergence of personal wellbeing and their ability to directly influence the wellbeing of others on site. The *cost* of ill-health was seen as a key motivator to engage employers. Many businesses rely heavily on a few key individuals. Consequently, if they are suddenly absent the company suffers too.

Finally, an interesting insight into wellbeing in the industry came from the partner of a senior manger who had recently resigned due to burnout. She suggested that to get a true understanding of how the partners of people working in construction feel about wellbeing, the researchers should put a hidden tape recorder in the ladies bathroom at an MBAV

dinner. Indeed, when one company boldly invited partners to a forum to discuss work and life balance issues, they were rewarded with heartfelt insight.

Stakeholder perspective - Summary and Implications

Although the plumbing and electrical trades have, to some extent, preemptively managed wellbeing issues through a cap on hours, fundamental problems still remain across the industry. According to stakeholders the sector has reached a 'tipping point'.

Stakeholder representatives acknowledged that the *'things that we are not good at we shy away from'* and *'breaking the habit is hard'*. However, a clear sense of purpose emerged throughout discussions. The culture change required to improve individual and company wellbeing could only be achieved through a shift in mindset and a collective effort.

A Review of Workplace Wellbeing Policy and Practice Literature

The complete review of literature undertaken for this project is available in Attachment One.

Review of Literature - Summary and Implications

Many commentators have remarked upon the changing nature of traditional families, the ageing of the workforce, and shifting attitudes to work in the last few decades. This has resulted in extensive academic research and media discussion of workplace and family issues, both in Australia and overseas. More recently, the focus on work/life has been on flexibility in the workplace and the broader concept of wellbeing.

The construction industry is exposed to some unique issues that have the potential to exaggerate work/life conflict for its workers - the pressures that come with competitive tendering; the cyclical nature of work; the strongly entrenched male-dominated culture; and labour and trade skills shortages. Yet, according to a 2004 report, (Yasbek, 2004, p. 9.), "In Australia, the retail, construction and hospitality sectors are the least likely to offer work/life balance policies."

If the construction industry is to attract and retain workers and continue to be competitive, it is imperative that the wellbeing of its workers is examined and addressed, not only for the sake of those workers, but also for the industry as a whole.

The first two sections of the literature review provide an outline of broad and specific industry work/life issues and the implications of these both for the individual and the construction industry. Material is gathered from Australia and overseas and relates to some specific research studies in the Australian construction industry. The issues discussed are:

- **Impact on physical safety** – It has long been recognised in the construction industry that workplaces expose workers to physical and chemical hazards. But researchers have only recently begun to expose the health impact of long hours, as well as the impact of fatigue and stress on safety in the industry. For example, a recent study reported that on construction sites in United States, employees who worked a 5 day week have lower injury frequency rates than those working a 6 or 7 day week.

- **Burnout and low productivity** – This is one of the most commonly discussed indicators of work/life conflict. The cost of burnout-related claims represents a major proportion of the total number of all compensation costs. It can also prove costly to the individual organisation, as burnout is strongly related to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and low retention rates.

- **The 'silent epidemic': stress, depression and suicide** - It is estimated that as much as 60% of absenteeism is attributable to stress-related disorders. Statistics show that suicide mortality rates in the Australian construction industry are approximately 75% higher than Australian male rates.

- **Impact on family and social life** – Long and irregular work hours, and the possibility of working on remote sites requiring extensive travel or frequent relocation, cause great strain on family and social networks, often resulting in isolation, marital breakdown and depression. Aligning the realities of work demands with the expectations and responsibilities of family life is often very difficult to achieve for Australian construction workers. Research suggests that many are better at segregating and 'protecting' the work domain from family interference than vice versa.

The third section of the literature review explores potential solutions to some of these problems, both in theory and in practice. Some of the solutions presented cover a range of industries both in Australia and overseas, some are very specific to the construction industry. These include:

- **Reduced or more flexible working hours -** A number of arguments have been presented in favour of reduced hours and greater flexibility, as well as against. 'Experiments' with compressed working have been piloted in some Australian construction companies and the outcomes of these pilots are considered. Among the key findings is the acknowledgment that the culture of long and irregular hours in the construction industry is deeply entrenched and often hard to avoid in a competitive tendering environment. More theoretically it is argued that reducing hours of work alone has little impact - a supportive workplace environment and committed leadership are much more important determinants of general wellbeing than work hours.

- **Flexibility, family-friendly programs and the power of perception –** Research and practical insights indicate that implementing family-friendly work policies could enhance productivity, morale and efficiency within the implementing organisation, *regardless* of whether employees are likely to use them or not. Perceived flexibility in the workplace it is argued allows for greater integration between work and home life and some level of worker control. This certainly seemed an important consideration for workers participating in a Queensland construction industry pilot project. However, it is also argued that perceptions can easily be countered by an uncooperative or uncommitted manager. It would seem that if they are to be effective, work/life, or family-friendly initiatives need to be more than tokenistic. They must be supported and implemented with conviction.

- **Supportive, consultative environment –** Research in the last two decades has highlighted the fact that employee commitment to an organisation goes beyond the

availability of work/life benefits and is more strongly related to a belief in a supportive work environment. Support is seen as both practical and emotional. It is argued that supervisors should be provided with sensitivity training to assist them in working effectively with their employees. The role of management and effective and open communication, in terms of supporting workers and committing to programs, is seen by many as critical to the successful implementation of work/life balance initiatives. Again, the findings from some Australian construction pilot programs are used to highlight these arguments.

- **Physical health and psychological support –** Considered leaders in the field, significant work has been done in the United Kingdom to address workplace health, and particularly stress, in the construction industry. A number of Australian support programs have also been established, specifically to deal with substance abuse, mental health issues and suicide. These include the national OzHelp Foundation, which has proved very successful in helping to educate the construction industry about these issues, with particular focus on apprentices; the Victorian *Life Care* support scheme designed to provide apprentices and young workers with mental health support services and suicide prevention advice; and the Building Trades Group (BTG) Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Program. Despite the success of these peer lead initiatives, it is argued that there are still some leaders and managers who are unwilling or uninterested in taking action to improve health outcomes for their employees, which presents a significant challenge.

- **Solutions related to specific age groups/life-phases -** It is now widely understood that people's values, family and work expectations change as they progress through various stages of family life and that work environments need to cater for a diverse and multi-generational workforce with different 'life-stage' requirements. An interesting 'gap' here is the lack of evidence to determine if single and childless employees feel supported by their organisations. Australia faces a 'clash' of expectations of the different generations, with baby boomers and generations X and Y all looking at the workplace differently. It is well documented that the nation's workforce is ageing and at least one construction related report has investigated older workers' perspectives on their training and retention in the industry. The growing labour shortage has also encouraged the industry to begin looking at ways of attracting and retaining apprentices.

- **A multiple program approach -** A number of researchers suggest that the most effective organisational responses to reducing turnover and creating more effective work/life balance are those that combine work-family policies with other human resources practices. Recognition must be given to the fact that there is no 'one size fits all' solution. There should be multiple initiatives that are mutually supportive. Yet, while this multi-layered approach seems to be effective – and again some examples from Australian pilot projects are reviewed - some researchers argue that it does not go far enough.

- **A systems approach and cultural change** – In the last few years, researchers and practitioners have begun to argue that policies, practices and legislation, while necessary, are not sufficient to make change. Collaborative implementation with

A Report for the BICC on Work and Life Balance/Wellbeing in the Victorian Commercial Building and Construction Sector

industry-wide conviction, cultural change and a systems approach is the only way to be effective. Researchers from the Boston College for the Center for Family and Work argue that constructive cultural change in the future must be achieved by prioritising the follow key areas: influencing leaders; providing a clear business case; helping individuals make and negotiate good career choices; developing and implementing HR policies and programs; and influencing social policy. Influencing leaders seems crucial. In the Australian context, it is acknowledged that many leaders are skeptical about the impact of work/life programs and fail to see that profit comes from good performance. Good performance is the result of employee commitment and feeling valued as a whole person. The evidence on cost-benefits of work/life and wellbeing programs, it is argued, is increasingly clear, but leaders need to be convinced of this fact. Other research focused on workplace 'excellence' presents 15 themes that are drivers for creating such excellence and a shared vision. These drivers are: *Quality of working relationships; Workplace leadership; Having a say; Clear values; Being safe; The built environment; Recruitment; Pay and conditions; Getting Feedback; Autonomy and uniqueness; A sense of ownership and identity; Learning; Passion; Having fun; Community connections.*

According to the Hewitt *Best Employers in ANZ* study, the largest employee research project and market practice audit in Australia and New Zealand, being a *Best Employer* "means something to everyone who impacts your success:

- To your **leaders** it means they share a common vision and have chartered a clear course for the future.

- To your **HR team** it means they have implemented the right people practices to inspire high performance.

- To your **employees** it means they see a future, believe in and are excited by it, and understand what it means for them and their work.

- To your **shareholders** high employee Engagement will translate into better business results and that you are well–positioned for growth and transformation.

- To your **customers** it means you will deliver on your customer promise as you have on your employee promise.

- To **potential employees** it means your organisation is a great place to work."

10   CONCLUSION

There is evidence from the World Health Organisation that work-related stress has increased in recent decades in many industrialised nations. A study of young New Zealand employees, undertaken by researchers at King's College London, found that work stress appears to bring on diagnosable forms of depression and anxiety in previously healthy young workers. It also found that high work pressure, high workload, and working very quickly to tight inflexible deadlines doubled the risk of depression and anxiety. High stress jobs were those that involved heavy workloads, non-negotiable tight deadlines, 'control freak' bosses and roles in which mistakes are highly visible. Top of the identified 'stress league' were head chefs and construction workers – "They are six times more likely to buckle under stress", researchers reported.[3]

Over the past decade, an ever increasing body of research has built a case to support the theory that work place policies and practices designed to support individuals to achieve a sense of work/life balance are a business imperative. Such findings, along with the challenge of recruiting and retaining high caliber staff in an increasingly competitive labour market, should motivate more employers to integrate work/life balance and employee wellbeing strategies into their business practices.

The data collected in this project adds weight to the social and economic argument for work/life balance strategies, linking it with benefits for companies that include reduced absenteeism and burnout, improved working relationships and morale, and increased productivity.

This study placed a spotlight on wellbeing issues amongst commercial construction companies and key subcontractors. It has revealed an overwhelming sense that, although people in the industry find construction work satisfying, they are collectively weary and generally sad about the personal cost they endure as a consequence of their work. On the whole, working hours that are out of sync with family life, and ongoing pressure that has a detrimental impact on physical and mental wellbeing, are taking a serious toll on people in the industry.

From all accounts, unrealistic programming appears to be the root cause of work/life conflict in the Victorian commercial construction industry. The flow-on pressure this causes impacts all aspects of project construction and people at all levels of the industry, to varying degrees. The cultural features of long hours, weekend work, confrontational work environments, and inadequate human resource management skills, resourcing pressure and liquidated damages are having a negative impact on the wellbeing of individuals, companies and the industry.

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[3] See http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-wellbeing/health-news/highstress-jobs-double-chances-of-depression-459947.html

Exploration of the impact of work/life conflict for employees at all levels revealed significant human cost. It also demonstrated that men will talk about how they feel given an invitation to do so and the right environment. One group of labourers actually asked, "*Why can't we talk about this more?*"

What participants in this study have contributed clearly points to the need for cultural / behaviour change at both the industry and company level. Construction is undoubtedly a 'macho' environment where dealing with 'soft' management issues is not common practice. Inadequately developed communication skills and emotional intelligence are impacting on working relationships on site. It seems that communication is viewed only as a means of providing necessary information. But participants spoke about a desire for much more effective two-way communication, to build relationships and respect. Employers need to develop more than a one-dimensional view of people as project resources.

Lack of strategic HR thinking and practice is limiting the capacity of companies to effectively align workforce wellbeing with project outcomes. The industry is clearly full of good project managers and tradesmen. Yet, by their own admission, they cannot run a job these days without putting some effort into the people, and line managers just do not have the time or know-how in relation to this. Employees want a workplace in which individuals are acknowledged, where people treat each other with respect, and care about each other in terms of their safety on the job and as individuals with often complex personal lives.

Plumbing and electrical trades are seen to have provided enviable protection for family and 'me' time, with capped hours built into industrial agreements. However, the lack of consistency with the broader construction environment in this regard adds to the pressure for project managers.

Ideally, participants want their weekend protected so they can reclaim it for recovery, leisure and family. Wages staff are somewhat conflicted about Saturday work because of the current arrangement that provides significant financial benefit in working Saturday and many cannot 'afford ' to lose that. Given the commercial pressure that currently comes to bear on sites, employees do not see a future where no Saturday work is possible, unless changes are industry-wide.

In the current environment, the initiative that is most highly valued at all levels is implementation of lockdown weekends. This provides predictability (not always so in the case of RDOs) and people can make plans and know they will not let family and friends down. One participant said, "*It makes me feel like I have been let out of jail when we have a lockdown.*"

RDOs are also highly valued by people who are in a position to regularly enjoy their benefit. They certainly assist people to recover in the current construction environment. For those workers whose weekly incomes are significantly boosted by regular weekend work, they accept this work pattern as the price they pay to maintain a 'good' lifestyle for their family. Nevertheless, RDO's alone are not the long-term solution to managing wellbeing, as we are now seeing clear evidence of the personal, social and economic ramifications of the six day work week over an extended period in an environment where RDO's operate.

To focus discussion on the issue of when RDO's should be rostered would be a simplistic 'band aid' approach to the integrated cultural issues affecting physical and mental wellbeing raised in this report. The question remains: should small adaptations to current arrangements be made or should a more 'gutsy' approach be taken that will holistically address the integrated issues affecting the wellbeing of construction employees?

Evidence would suggest that the time has come to respond to a changed labour market and more competitive social and economic conditions. The industry should be driving cultural change to create a strong and sustainable future.

At this point in time only one company in the sample has attempted to proactively and strategically address issues similar to those raised in this report. It is, however, limited by the broader environment in which it operates. This points to the need for a more cooperative approach involving government, industry, employers and unions to achieve the sort of culture change required to make a difference to the wellbeing of people across the industry.

It should be noted, for example, that in the government sector, unrealistic programming is at odds with its *Action Agenda for Work and Family Balance*. This agenda calls for a Whole-of-Victorian-Government approach to:

- lead the way in work and family balance
- support industry to adopt practices that enhance work and family balance
- work with the community on work and family issues.

Simply recognising a problem does not solve it. There is no doubt that it is time to address work arrangements and apply contemporary people management practices to the construction industry.

In order to combat the projected labour shortages in Australia, employers will need to become facilitators, creating innovative ways to overcome obstacles and to attract the supply of labour available. The construction industry must challenge the existing culture and move toward a systems approach in addressing the wellbeing of its employees. The benefits for workers are obvious: job and life satisfaction; a greater sense of control; less stress and better health. For the construction industry, the benefits are just as clear: improved attraction and retention of high performing staff; reduced staff turnover; reduced absenteeism and associated costs; and increased productivity. Aiming to effectively and proactively manage employee wellbeing needs to be part of regular business and embedded into an organisational and industry culture.

11   RECOMMENDATIONS

This research project was designed to inform the development of an industry wellbeing blueprint based on input from the sector.

The following recommendations are intended to create such a strategic framework, initially for large and medium tier companies. They address the report's conclusion, which points to the need for a multi-faceted approach involving all key stakeholders. The recommendations made go beyond identifying tools and support required to implement effective wellbeing policies and practices. They set out to address the need for holistic culture change at industry and company level with the ultimate aim of improving wellbeing, a fundamental part of which is for the industry to make the six day work week uncommon practice except in circumstances where safety is an issue.

The recommendations are presented in terms of stakeholder groups, making it clear with whom accountability lies, and highlighting the interrelationship of effort that will be required to achieve change.

Government through the BICC

- Conduct cost benefit analysis that takes into account the local economic and industry specific work environment to compare current work patterns with suggested alternatives to help determine if the industry can afford to make the changes recommended by this report.

- Determine an approach to manage the implementation of the proposed blueprint.

- Raise awareness about the findings of this report through presentations to industry participants, key industry stakeholders and clients, and get buy-in to further explore industry culture change.

- Promote the findings of the report to the wider community and support industry stakeholders in seeking culture change to enhance wellbeing across the broader industry sector.

- Develop a model industry wellbeing charter - a set of wellbeing principles available to companies to assist them in developing a systematic approach to wellbeing.

- Further educate Government agencies where they act as clients to the construction industry to raise awareness of the findings of this Report and the strategic intent of Government's *Action Agenda for Work and Family Balance* that calls for a Whole-of-Victorian-Government approach to:

   o   lead the way in work and family balance

   o   support industry to adopt practices that enhance work and family balance

   o   work with the community on work and family issues

- Consult widely to establish a programming formula for works in various categories e.g. simple, conventional and complex (such as a $100m hospital) in order to provide guidance to industry and clients so that they can implement findings of this Report to improve wellbeing

Establish demonstration pilot projects to promote and trial work arrangements consistent with the findings of this Report and designed to enhance wellbeing for employees at all levels.

Employer Associations

- Raise awareness at senior level about the need to develop a more strategic approach to human resource management across the industry and promote its potential to add value to bottom line results.

Employer Association and Unions

- Lead the development of an accredited unit of competency tailored to frontline managers in the industry. This would be focused on managing people, with emphasis on wellbeing.

- Support this wellbeing training program with a set of resources that frontline managers can use on site.

- Establish a wellbeing awareness campaign targeting people at all levels in the industry to highlight the mutual benefit of a balanced life for individuals and companies. This should be developed to create consistent and collective, not competing, messages by drawing on expertise from a range of stakeholders, such as Incolink, Vic Health, WorkSafe, cBus and communication professionals.

Companies

- Acknowledge that unrealistic work demands are not sustainable over time and come at a cost to the organisation which is often not recognised or tracked.

- Use the findings of this report as the basis for a more detailed exploration of company specific work practices, cultural barriers and opportunities to improve individual wellbeing including identifying ways of reducing employee workloads particularly in line management roles.

- Speak with employees' partners for greater insight into the impact of work practices.

- Align human resource management and wellbeing to the business strategy.

- Determine wellbeing priorities at the company level.

- Document a plan of action to proactively manage wellbeing which incorporates the wellbeing charter and a systems approach tailored to the needs of the business and its employee group.
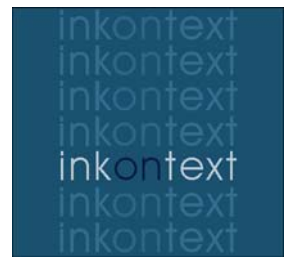
ATTACHMENTS

1. Literature Review
2. Invitation letter to companies
3. Employer interview guide
4. Employee survey
5. Employee discussion group guide

FINAL REPORT

BUILDING INDUSTRY CONSULTATIVE COUNCIL

WELLBEING RESEARCH PROJECT

A LITERATURE REVIEW OF WORKPLACE WELLBEING POLICY AND PRACTICE IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

By Dr Emma Curtin

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February 2008

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 INTRODUCTION

"We understand the difficulties posed by site conditions and the fragmented structure of the industry, but construction cannot afford not to get the best from the people who create value for clients and profits for companies." [4]

Many commentators have remarked upon the changing nature of traditional families, the ageing of the workforce, and shifting attitudes to work in the last few decades. This has resulted in extensive academic research and media discussion of workplace and family issues, both in Australia and overseas.[5] According to Brad Carrington from the Boston College Center for Work and Family, the concept of work-life has evolved from two main paths – focus on childcare with the increase of women in the workforce; and focus on occupational stress and depression through Employee Assistance Programs. In the 1970s the 'myth' of the separate worlds of work and family was explored and the 1980s saw a rise of corporate interest and involvement in the issue. (Harrington, 2007, p. 4) Work-life conflict – work interfering with family life and family life interfering with work - became discussed widely across industries and nations, as were the outcomes of this conflict - job and life dissatisfaction, burnout, high staff turnover, depression, marital problems and reduction in general wellbeing. A good work-life balance, it was argued, should include three main aspects: time balance (the amount of time across work and non-work activities); satisfaction balance (satisfaction derived from work and non-work); and involvement balance (the psychological involvement in work and non-work activities). (Hudson, 2005, p. 3; Bradley et al, 2006, p. 2)

More recently, the focus on work-life has been on flexibility in the workplace and the broader concept of wellbeing. This is also strongly inter-related with our growing national 'epidemics' of coronary disease, obesity, diabetes and other problems related to our stressful and often sedentary lifestyle. Many organisations are now seeking ways to improve the wellbeing of their workers, recognising the benefits of this in terms of productivity and cost-cutting due to reduced absenteeism. In the last couple of months, for example, media coverage has been given to IBM's investment in "healthy living" incentives to employees in the United States, focusing on such things as weight loss and smoke-free rebates. In the Australian context, initiatives such as the Springboard Health and Performance research project (announced in August 2007) have been launched to determine the direct relationship between worker health and their productivity; whether corporate programs are effective; and which type of programs offer the greatest impact. (CCH, *Health and productivity: link to be found*, 2007). The list of corporate work-life and wellbeing programs is now extensive across many corporations, including health and wellness, benefits and rewards programs, job design, career advancement and leadership development, and corporate social responsibility, to name but a few. (Harrington, p.8)

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[4] Quoted from *Rethinking Construction*. The Report from the UK Construction Taskforce (1998), p. 14.

[5] Studies have been undertaken in the UK, the US, Canada, the Netherlands, Finland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark to name but a few. See for example: Allen et al (2000); Allen (2006); Berg (2003); Boyar et al (2003); Burgess & Connell (2006); Casper et al (2007); Grant-Vallone et al (2001); Greenhaus et al (2003); Jansen et al (2006); Jones, G. (2006); Kasper et al (2005); LaMontagne et al (2006); Marsden (2004); McDonald et al (2007); OECD (2006); Pocock et al (2007); Rossi et al (2006); Sparks et al (2001); Todd (2004); Ulker (2006).

Many of the issues raised in terms of work-life conflict during the development of corporate programs have direct relevance to Australian industry and more specifically, the construction industry. However, construction also has some unique issues that have the potential to exaggerate the problems, particularly the pressures that come with competitive tendering. The industry is strongly influenced by economic cycles and can be susceptible to skill shortages as well as oversupply for some skills. Construction is the fifth largest employing industry in Australia, employing 936,000 people (or 9% of the total workforce) as at August 2007. (Skillsinfo, 2007, p. 1) Yet, according to a 2004 New Zealand report "in Australia, the retail, construction and hospitality sectors are the least likely to offer work-life balance policies. (Yasbek, 2004, p.9) The limited number of women in the industry is without doubt an issue and is perhaps both a cause and effect of the perceived 'un-family-friendly' nature of the construction industry – women are not attracted to an industry that does not support a family/work balance; and a low representation of women has "prohibited any widespread reforms." (Francis & Lingard, 2002, p.31)

If the construction industry is to attract and retain workers and continue to be competitive, it is imperative that the wellbeing of its workers is examined and addressed, not only for the sake of those workers, but also for the industry as a whole. Indeed, some researchers strongly argue that "the work-family balance performance of construction organisations should be scrutinised, alongside occupational health and safety and environmental indicators, as part of their overall corporate social responsibility profile." (Lingard & Francis, 2007, p. 90)

2 SECTION ONE: ISSUES IMPACTING ON WORK LIFE IN THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

> *"Construction in Australia, by its nature, is characterised by competition, resource supply and demand issues and potential situations of conflict. Construction organisations face heavy time demands coupled with stringent sequencing of tasks."* (Biggs et al, 2005, p. 1).

The construction industry is known anecdotally or by perception as an environment of long hours, high stress levels, dangerous, difficult and dirty work, and a deeply entrenched male-dominated culture. (Murie, 2007; Lingard, 2004) Within the industry, employees are often segmented between salary (e.g. university educated engineers) and wage earners (skilled tradesman or unskilled labourers), or between public and private sector workers.[6] Yet, while there is evidence of some obvious differences in the type of issues confronting these groups of employees, they share many common concerns – excessive hours, burnout, work-family conflict, health issues – and many of the potential solutions they suggest show some common ground. (Townsend et al, 2006, p. 195) Extensive theoretical research and numerous specific surveys of construction workers over the years has emphasised the demanding nature of the industry nationally and internationally and sought to investigate the impact of these conditions, whether real or perceived, on the wellbeing of its workers. What follows in this section is an outline of those specific industry conditions. The section after that will look at and the implications of these conditions.

Long hours and inadequate recovery

Recognising the importance of conflicting family and work issues in the workforce, Helen Lingard and Anna Sublet established a research study in 2001 to explore work, family, and employee wellbeing in the Australian construction industry. The results of a survey of professional civil engineers working in consulting and contracting organisations in New South Wales and Victoria revealed that, of those questioned, 44% were working over 45 hours per week, with 21% working over 50 hours. Thirty-three percent of these workers "expressed dissatisfaction on the balance between work and family." (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 507). A 2004 survey of one large Australian contracting organisation reported an average of 62.5 hours per week among site-based workers, 56.1 hours among site office workers, and 49 hours per week for those in head or regional office. (Lingard & Francis, 2004). The results of the 2001 study suggested that the single most important factor in determining civil engineers' experiences of relationship quality was the number of hours they work each week. The 2004 study also highlighted the strong relationship between long working hours and the negative impact on family life, particularly for site-based

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[6] Some argue that the salaried workers have longer associations with their employer, while "loyalty for the wage earning employees can often be through their pay packets and working conditions, rather than the organisation." An important difference here is that waged staff are covered by enterprise agreements providing overtime penalty rates, while salaried staff do not receive hourly overtime (Townsend et al, 2006b). See also Lingard, H. and Francis, V. (2004). The work-life experiences of office and site-based employees in the Australian construction industry. *Construction Management and Economics* 22(9): 991-1002.

workers. In 2007, Lingard and Francis reported that on average, workers in public sector construction organisations worked 43.26 hours, while those in the private sector worked an average of 56.52 hours. (Lingard & Francis, 2007, p. 90).

Lingard and colleagues argue that the implementation of work-life balance initiatives by construction organisations may benefit employees. However, for such initiatives to be successful, these organisations and their employees must deviate from the "norm of rigid, long work hours that predominates in the construction industry." (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 515). As stated by many over the last few years, acknowledged informally, and summarised by Bradley in 2006, the Australian construction industry (and international counterparts) has a "demanding work environment, with longer than average working hours." The nature of the work is also "stressful, with tight deadlines and severe financial penalties if targets are not met." (Bradley et al, 2006, p. 2). Site-based employees are also often required, during peak times, to work "significant amounts of unpaid overtime, often with little warning." (Lingard, 2004, p. 290; Lingard and Francis, 2005a, p. 1046)

In the UK, it was reported in 2007, that long hours of working is on the increase, according to a new analysis of workforce data by the Trade Union Council (TUC). Under the *European Working Time Directive,* employees are protected from working more than an average 48-hour week. But in the UK – unlike other EU countries – all workers can opt out of this protection. The TUC claims that a lack of enforcement means "bad employers know this is employment legislation they can breach with little or no risk of any consequences" and that the rise in numbers was "very disturbing." (Berry, 2007)

Competitive tendering adds additional pressures to the construction industry, with the simple fact that if companies do not tender competitively then they will have no work available, and if they are to compete, compressing deadlines through long hours is often the approach taken. While many employees suggest that government jobs face less of this pressure than private industry, the pressure is still there nonetheless. (Townsend et al, 2006, p. 197)

Professional/management related issues in the construction industry

In 2005, research undertaken by Lingard and Francis highlighted the fact the long hours and the ingrained construction industry culture had an impact not just on the waged workers but also on the professional, managerial levels of the construction industry. (Lingard & Francis, 2005b).

In the 1990s, researchers were acknowledging that in the construction industry, a conflict of roles was prevalent at management level (Bacharach et al, 1991 as discussed in Lingard, 2004). Lingard and Sublet noted that,

> typically the management of construction projects involves a trade-off between cost, time and quality. Added to these are safety and environmental imperatives and the threat of personal liability in the event of unforeseen incidents … [role conflict] may be more strongly associated with more severe, 'life and death' consequences than in other occupational groups.(Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 513)

This argument was reinforced by Bradley and colleagues, who asserted in 2006 that due to the very high-risk nature of the industry, the pressure on construction management is often higher than in other sectors." Construction professionals often bear "significant responsibility – not only for the completion of projects, but also the physical safety of workers." They also claim that the construction industry has a

particularly "adversarial culture in which disputes and conflict are commonplace." Surprisingly, however, argue Bradley and colleagues, "there is little guidance available to project managers on how to sustain the wellbeing and work-life balance" of their workers. (Bradley et al., 2006, p. 2)

A number of works also discuss a lack of adequate training for managers in dealing with their own, and their employees' wellbeing/work-life issues. In 2006, for example, in an article in *Personnel Today* magazine, the author stated that in the UK construction industry, "poor planning, lack of feedback and generally poor communications feature highly as a cause of stress ... These demonstrate weaknesses in management and must be addressed as a matter of good practice." (Berry, 2006)

In 2005, Biggs and colleagues highlighted the sometimes tyrannical approach taken by construction industry managers, driven by pressure from a variety of sources. They claimed that

> often the pre-occupation with logistics management and supply chain considerations can compel management staff into taking an autocratic approach to solving problems. Potential outcomes of this adversarial culture include the depersonalisation of the workforce, disengagement by individual workers from safety requirements, and a demonisation of competitors, supervisors and employees. (Biggs et al, 2005, p. 1).

Chapman also argues that "changing attitudes among managerial and professional staff, responding to exhortations about 'doing more with less', 'working smarter, not harder' and so on, may be adding to the burden of stress." (Chapman, 2006, p. 103)

Construction industry culture and a male dominated environment

The construction industry is one of the most male-dominated of all industries. In 2007, females made up only 11.4% of the construction industry workforce, compared with the average of 44.9% for all industries. (Skillsinfo, 2007, p. 8)

In 2002, Lingard and Sublet stated that it should be acknowledged that the 'take-up' of work-life balance initiatives by men was very poor. This was likely due to the traditional assumptions about separation of home and family and the gendered division of labour. Francis also argued that assumptions were made about work-family policies being associated only with women and that "men face criticism if they do not demonstrate 'ideal' masculine characteristics. This in turn can affect workplace perceptions of them possessing 'ideal' worker characteristics." (Francis, 2004, p. 2) Consequently, researchers have argued that only in the context of "dramatic cultural change will the negative effects of work and non-work experiences be overcome ... [and] the need for cultural change is particularly acute in the construction industry." (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 515)

In a 2004 study of 93 Australian civil engineers, results indicated that despite many expressing a desire to reduce their working hours, it seemed that the "profession appears to suffer a 'cultural lag' with traditional values being considered the norm and consequently the ones rewarded (e.g. long work hours, full-time working)." (Francis, 2004, p. 6) Writing in 2006 with other colleagues, Francis further argued that the Australian construction industry culture is one perceived to devalue time-out for family commitments. (Francis et al, 2006) Francis also noted that after some years in the industry these cultural attitudes became ingrained:

however accepting of change they may be at the start of their career, male entrants inadvertently reinforce current attitudes and practices by emulating the behaviours of the managers who influenced their own career developments. (Francis, 2004, p. 7)

However, these arguments are not unique to the construction industry. In a 2002 Australian study of work/life balance strategies in Australian organisations, it was suggested that some key barriers to the implementation and effectiveness of work-life balance strategies included an organisational culture that emphasises and rewards long hours; and resistance of supervisors and middle management. (de Cieri et al, 2002, p. 4)

These barriers were also not unique to Australia. Writing in the New Zealand context in 2007, Dr Mervyl McPherson argued that one of the problems with the introduction of work-life policies is that they "create new ways of working without addressing the underlying assumptions that reward only the old ways of working. In workplaces without supportive cultures, people who take advantage of the new ways tend to be negatively affected through less access to training, promotion and other benefits." (McPherson, 2007).

Family/worker expectations

In a 2001 survey of civil engineers in the construction industry, it was noted that the overwhelming majority of respondents were male, many of whom were in "'two-person, single-career' partnerships in which both members of a married or de facto couple work together to fulfill the demands of the husband's job. Both partners in such families devote their resources to supporting the career of one partner." (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 513) It was also noted, however, that "it is possible that respondents' justification for working long hours and weekends is that they are 'bringing home the bacon' but that conflict arises where partners perceive pay to be insufficient to justify this level of job involvement." (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 513)

In a 2004 study of work and family trends in Australian family, Campbell and Charlesworth argued that the changing nature of the workforce in recent years has meant that employees are no longer "the 'ideal workers' associated with the earlier 'male breadwinner/female homemaker' model ... freely available to their employers for the prescribed period of their labour." (Campbell & Charlesworth, 2004, p. i)

In a later article in 2005, Lingard also argues that the roles and expectations of men and women have changed significantly in the past 60 years and that consequently "the number of dual-income couples overall has increased." (Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1045). This paper, written with Valerie Francis, outlines the dramatic changes to 'traditional' family structures and workforce composition over the last few decades. Other societal changes include the move from institutional aged care to home and community based care, which often means increased responsibility for families to care for the elderly. (Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1046). The implications of all of these changes, Lingard and Francis argue, has seen a significant shift in expectations. Both men and women now place greater value on both work and family involvement - it can no longer be assumed that employees are 'free' to devote all their energy to their work. Yet, during a study of construction professionals it was not that males often expressed the desire to assist more with home life, but felt guilty and unable to do so, due to work responsibilities. (Francis et al, 2006)

A recent study of 43 construction employees working in Victoria added a further dimension to the work-life expectation debate. In all cases, participants stated that "the expectation that child-free employees would work longer hours (especially night shifts) was assumed rather than stated overtly." To the author of the resulting study report, this "may suggest that child-free employees' non-work activities are valued less" than employees with dependent children. (Turner, 2007, p. 12)

Resourcing

In a 2004 report on work and family practices in the construction industry, it was stated that 41% of employers interviewed believed that skill shortage, attraction and retention would remain key issues for the industry. (Polish & Carroll, 2004, p. 19) In 2005, *The Australian* reported that "if the construction industry is to replace its retiring workers and meet growth demands, between 40,000 and 50,000 new skilled workers will be needed in the next five years." Campbell and Charlesworth also reported that since 1985, casualisation of employment has grown significantly in the Australian construction industry. (Campbell & Charlesworth, 2004, p. 46) According to the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations (DEWR), the number of skilled vacancies for trades increased by 189.8% between March 2002 and June 2005. The largest increases in skilled vacancies over this period occurred for metal trades (up 487.6%), electrical and electronics trades (up 304.9%) and construction trades (up 241.1%). (ABS, 2006) However, a 2007 report argues that

> In view of public discourse about the growth in part time and casual positions in many sectors, it is interesting to note that the composition of the construction work force, in terms of the nature of employment, has trended towards an increase in fulltime employment. Within the construction industry, the percentage of full time employees with paid leave entitlements increased from 35 to 40 per cent between 1994 and 2006, while the percentage of part time and casual workers grew by 2 per cent. Most of the growth in part time employment was made up of part time owner managers. (Allen consulting, 2007, p. 10)

Nonetheless, argue Townsend and colleagues, the "industry's failure to respond to employees' work-life balance expectations by maintaining long working weeks threatens to substantially reduce the industry's long term performance and competitiveness" in attracting workers. They report that combined Workplace Industrial Relations study data from across Australia's eastern states indicates that 68% of construction workplaces had difficulty in recruiting personnel. (Townsend et al, 2008, p. 4)

In 2004 Helen Lingard stated that there is a common perception that the construction industry is rife with bad work practices in a dirty and dangerous physical environment, which, not surprisingly has a negative impact on recruiting and retaining quality employees. In a 1990s British study it was reported that 42% of construction professionals were actively looking for new positions. (Lingard, 2004, p. 290). In 2006 the Chartered Institute of Building in the UK surveyed construction professionals and results showed that 84% of those questioned believed that "stress in the construction industry was a factor for poor retention rates." (Campbell, 2006, p. 1).

For apprentices, the attractions of the construction industry are also perceived to be low. In October 2007 an Australian report relating to the living standards of apprentices was released to "gain some idea of the attractiveness of apprenticeships to young people" across a number of work sectors. (Bittman et al,

2007, p. 1) Like other commentators, the authors noted the skills shortage 'crisis' in Australia and the anxiety that this was creating among employers. While it is asserted that part of a response to this problem will be training young Australians, it is also recognised that this may not be easy given that "apprenticeships must compete with alternative forms of employment in the Australian labour market." Overall, the findings of the report are not promising:

> research shows that beginning an apprenticeship is not only initially less attractive than other alternative pathways but completing training requires the capacity to endure sustained periods of relative deprivation before rewards become commensurate with those of age peers. Low relative earnings and lower standard of living, with their associated deprivations, will lead to continuing difficulties in recruiting apprentices and to poor rates of completion. (Bittman et al, 2007, p. 3)

Although it is argued that allowances can increase apprentice income and that the construction industry in Melbourne can increase first year apprentice pay by up to 50%, it is acknowledged that even when mandatory allowances are taken in to account many have "disposable incomes below the poverty line." (Bittman et al, 2007, p. 2) The consequences of this are also discussed. For example, it is argued that apprentice pay "extends the period of dependence on parents – and must presumably make these young members of the workforce feel unnecessarily juvenile and insufficiently autonomous." (Bittman et al, 2007, p. 18) The psychological implications of this are not hard to imagine. Indeed a Victoria study to explore apprentice wellbeing issues through a survey of ninety members of Group Training Companies (GTOs) in 2006 indicated that financial hardship was the top issue dealt with on behalf of apprentices. It is also interesting to note that the issues identified as most difficult to deal with and for which the GTOs felt least prepared, was mental health. (GTA Victoria Apprentice Wellbeing Survey, 2006)

3 SECTION TWO: IMPLICATIONS OF INDUSTRY CONDITIONS ON WORKER WELLBEING AND THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE

Work interference with family life has been associated generally with job and life dissatisfaction, absenteeism, higher staff turnover, burnout, mental health and drug and alcohol abuse. (Allen et al, 2000; Boyar et al, 2003; Grant-Vallone & Donaldson, 2001; Hammer et al, 2004; Lingard & Francis, 2005; Lingard et al, 2006; Lingard et al, 2007) The cost impact of these consequences has been raised by a number of researchers as they seek to "help convince policymakers of the need to provide interventions that might help mitigate work-family conflict." (Allen, 2000, p. 279). As Daniels and French argue, "the cost to employers in terms of the potential demotivation of workers who value their jobs, the cost of increased sickness levels, and serious workplace mistakes highlight a strong business case for addressing long hours and unsocial working." (Daniels & French, 2006, p. 156)

Impact on physical safety

"adequate rest and recovery time will yield improved worker health and reductions in human error" (Townsend et al, 2006b, p. 15)

Workers in the Australian construction industry are 2.4 times more likely to be killed at work than in any other industry and although these figures are comparable to the United States, they are double those of the United Kingdom. (Fleming et al, 2006, p. v). Importantly, a recent study reported that on construction sites in United States, employees who worked a 5 day week have lower injury frequency rates than those working a 6 or 7 day week. (Huang & Hinze, 2006, as discussed in Lingard et al, 2006, p. 610)

Judith Chapman argued in 2006 that, historically, safety management has been related to mitigating hazards due to machinery, tools, exposure to chemicals, harmful substances and other identifiable dangers in workplaces, particular those where manual labour was carried out. Now we have a broader understanding of what constitutes a hazard, including such things as "long periods of pressure and stress [that] can result in heart and cardiovascular disease." (Chapman, 2006, p. 102) This argument was supported by Fleming and colleagues, whose literature review of *Safer Construction* highlighted some of the cultural issues in the construction industry that can affect safety - the same things that are working against a work-life balance also affect safety. Secondary causes of construction accidents, it is argued, are associated with management system pressures (e.g. financial restrictions, lack of commitment to safety); they are also linked indirectly to social pressures (group attitudes, trade customs, traditions, attitudes to risk taking, commercial pressures). The ageing population, labour shortage, and high turnover also influence safety issues- "the combination of new and unskilled construction workers, work intensification inherent in this sector and the effects of worker stress, exhaustion, and fatigue also heighten the risk of injury." (Fleming et al, 2006, p. v) Indeed, a 1990 study argued that in excess of 50% of construction accidents are explained by worker turnover and ignorance of safety regulations. [7]

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[7] Y. Yu. (1990). The role of workers' behaviour and accomplishment in the prevention of accidents and injuries. *Safety Science*. 12. As discussed in Fleming et al, 2006, p. 45.

Lingard's 2005 book on *Occupational Health and Safety in Construction Project Management* also highlights studies that have raised several OHS issues associated with working overtime. These included sleep deprivation and the increased likelihood of injury, fatigue and stress, both at work and outside work. (Lingard, 2005) A recent New Zealand initiative to manage fatigue in shift workers highlighted the implications of exhaustion – "it reduces a person's capabilities to an extent that may impair their strength, speed, reaction time, coordination, decision making or balance …working long hours, working with intense mental or physical effort … all of these have obvious implications for workplace and public safety. Fatigue can also have longer-term effects on health." (Department of Labour, NZ, 2007b)

Townsend and colleagues highlighted the need to explore health and safety factors in future studies of work arrangements in the construction industry. Increased recovery time might result in fewer safety problems relating to human error, and conversely that the compressed work week may have an impact on "workers' fatigue, judgement and propensity to make dangerous errors." (Townsend et al, 2006b, p. 15). It is also argued that there is a strong negative impact on physical safety because of the related pressures of competitive tendering. One Australian construction employee notably stated that, "'you feel obliged to push as hard as you can ... [you] compromise safety...quality I think gets compromised a little bit.'" (Lingard et al, 2006 p. 619

Some health professionals believe there may be a connection between men's attitude to health and their work injuries. Dr Geoffrey Graham, in an article produced by *Workcover South Australia* in 2004, argued that recent studies have found that "Australian men could live longer, healthier lives if they saw a GP more regularly and made a few lifestyle changes." He continues:

> It's certainly true that men's risk-taking behaviour – often linked to a lack of understanding of the safety procedures – causes accidents. Combined with men's general lack of interest in their own health, they can be their own worst enemy. (Workcover, SA, 2004).

Burnout and low productivity

"the bottom line is that an unhealthy, unhappy workforce will also be uncommitted and unproductive." (Investors in People, UK, 2007)

Burnout is one the most commonly discussed indicators of work-life conflict, both nationally and internationally. (Lingard et al, 2004; Lingard & Francis, 2006, p. 185) Within the Australian construction industry context, research has indicated that while the number of claims for stress-related illnesses, such as burnout, represents only a small percentage of compensation claims, "the cost of these claims represents a major proportion of the total number of all compensation costs." (Lingard, 2004, p. 291) Burnout can also prove costly to an organisation's business health, as it is strongly related to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and low retention rates. (Lingard, 2004, p. 291)

In 2004, a survey of 182 practicing professional civil engineers[8] in consulting and contracting organisations in New South Wales and Victoria was conducted to explore the experience of work and family sources of burnout. A number of predictors were used to determine 'burnout', including *emotional exhaustion -*

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[8] From a total of 500 questionnaires distributed (Lingard, 2004, p. 294).

relationship conflict, role conflict; *cynicism* – satisfaction with promotion prospects, relationship satisfaction; and *personal competence* – clarity of role and satisfaction with job security. (Lingard, 2004, p. 294). Results indicated that burnout arises from a combination of work and family stressors, which would have an impact on work-life benefit initiatives to be considered. (Lingard, 2004, p. 296)

In 2005, Lingard and Francis argued that meeting work demands requires effort that results in short-term physiological and psychological reactions, and that these reactions are reversible "after a brief respite from work demands." However, they continue, if opportunities for respite are inadequate, the negative workload effects will continue to build, "resulting in longer-term effects, such as chronic stress, burnout, and fatigue which, if allowed to persist, ultimately lead to other health problems." (Lingard & Francis, 2005b, p. 735) Some studies also identify a link between burnout and coronary heart disease. (Lingard et al, 2006). The impact of burnout is felt both by the individual and by the organisation for which they work. The results of a 2005 study of 232 male construction workers (from a single organisation[9]) confirmed earlier research findings that "work hours and subjective overload pose a problem for men's participation in family life." (Lingard & Francis, 2005b, p. 743)

Burnout is not unique to the Australian construction industry. In the UK recently the Trade Union Council (TUC) has been calling on the government to enforce existing rights to protect vulnerable workers in terms of their working hours. The TUC General Secretary stated that "many employers recognise that overworked staff are unproductive ... no-one should forget that 48 hours is six eight-hour days – more than enough for anyone every week." (Berry, 2007) Burnout, stress and the health of employees on non-standard work schedules has also been identified as a major issue in Canada. A 2004 study of full-time employed Canadians in a large metropolitan city indicated that employees involved with weekend work and non-fixed day shifts reported significantly higher emotional exhaustion and health problems than other employees. (Jamal, 2004)

Ultimately, researchers argue, the construction industry should care about workers and their families not just out of legal obligation, but with a view to sustaining and improving their organisational performance. (Francis & Lingard, 2002)

The 'silent epidemic': Stress, depression and suicide

"the longer hours and commutes that are commonplace in modern working life, and the increased difficulty of juggling work with family life for many, are partly to blame for the growing medical and financial costs of mental ill health." (Fleming, 2007)

A recent article in *Construction Industry News* presented some information on a survey of construction industry workers for the Australian Research Council-funded *Work-life Balance in the Construction Industry Project*. Professor Kerry Brown from Queensland University of Technology's School of Management said the need for personal or "me" time had become apparent during interviews. She continued:

> people were searching for time to do the things that actually refreshed them for turning up to work in the following week ... part of the work/life

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[9] Lingard and Francis acknowledged the limitations of surveying staff from only one company, but argued that the company involved was one of Australia's largest construction organisations, and one that worked across all states and territories. (Lingard & Francis, 2005, p. 744)

balance equation had to include enough time to relax and do something of their choosing for themselves. This time was quite apart from having to attend to doctor's appointments, household shopping and chores, or children's sport … lack of this time to refresh oneself, and turning up to work un-rested, could be one of the underlying factors for workplace stress which we see on the rise … This points to managers and bosses needing to be open to more options for workers to manage their work hours. (Construction Industry News, October 31, 2007)

A year-long survey of Australian engineers undertaken in 2000 by the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists, and Managers, reported that workloads had increased by 63% and that the amount of stress had increased by 52%. (Lingard, 2004, p. 290). In 2006, Lingard and others reported that

> compensation claims for work-related stress are rising dramatically in Australia. For example, in Victoria, in 2003/4, there were 2,912 new stress claims. The number of stress claims has grown steadily in absolute numbers since the mid 1990s. Moreover, the proportion of total claims accounted for by stress has also grown steadily from 4.1% in 1994/95 to 9.1% in 2003/04. Work-related stress is clearly a major workforce health issue for the future. (Lingard et al, 20060

As argued in the 2006 report on workplace stress in Victoria, a range of organisational outcomes have been linked to job stress and stress-related illness, with absenteeism being the most widely studied. It is estimated that as much as 60% of absenteeism is attributable to stress-related disorders. (LaMontagne et al, 2006, p. 8)

In 2004 *Workcover, South Australia* reported that the national organisation established to deal with depression, *Beyond Blue*, commented that depression "is not often considered a workplace problem, but it affects one in five workers and results in six million lost work days each year, and a further 12 million days of reduced productivity." (Workcover, 2004)

In August 2007, the UK Telegraph reported that "people with excessive workloads, tight deadlines and overbearing bosses are twice as likely to develop certain mental illnesses as those in less high pressured jobs", with an estimated annual cost on lost productivity of £12 billion. (Fleming, 2007) A year before, *Personnel Today* magazine reported that the UK Health and Safety Executive estimated that across all industries almost 13 million working days are lost to stress, depression and anxiety - at a cost to business of at least £4bn. (Berry, 2006) In the UK construction industry, the article continues, "stress" has been "exacerbated by skills shortages." Referring to information gathered from the results of a survey of 1,000 professionals working in the construction sector, conducted by the Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB), it is concluded that "the construction industry is more stressful than it was five years ago." Results show that more than two thirds of respondents (68%) have suffered from stress, anxiety or depression. Skills shortages are also a cause of occupational health problems, with 55% of respondents indicating that inadequate staffing levels were a factor in causing stress. (Berry, 2006)

In 2006 the UK Chartered Institute of Building (CIOB) began a research initiative to enable a better understanding of occupational stress within the construction industry at a professional level. Stress was described by the UK Health and Safety Executive as "the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them." (Campbell, 2006, p. 3). It also investigated the main causes of workplace stress within the industry and examined coping mechanisms for dealing with this. The main causes of workplace stress cited by the respondents

were: lack of feedback (56.8%), poor communication (55.7%), inadequate staffing (55%), too much work (64.1%), ambitious deadlines (59.7%), pressure (59.9%) and conflicting demands (52.2%). The results of a survey show that the majority of respondents had suffered from stress, anxiety or depression as a direct result of working in the construction industry – of the 847 surveyed, 578 (68.2%) claimed to have suffered from stress, anxiety or depression, and 154 (26.6%) had sought medical assistance. Yet only 6% of those who had experienced occupational stress had taken time off as a result. It was suggested that the limited amount of leave taken might be "due to a perception that there would be a negative impact on their career if they admitted to suffering from stress." (Campbell, 2006, p. 1) The implications of this are significant when considering that these professionals have responsibility for the health and safety of other workers. It was notable that more than half of those surveyed believed that the construction industry was more stressful now than it was five years ago. (Campbell, 2006, p. 6). Interestingly, five years previously in 2001, a book and leaflets had been released by the UK Health and Safety Executive entitled *Tackling work related stress: a manager's guide to improving and maintaining employee health and wellbeing*. Obviously, despite valiant attempts by the UK industry to change cultural attitudes by stating:

> REMEMBER: stress is not a weakness and you don't have to suffer. Your employer has a duty to protect your health and safety at work and a good employer will appreciate any suggestions you have for reducing work-related stress. Work-related stress is a symptom of an organisational problem, not an individual weakness. (HSE, 2001)

These views were still firmly entrenched and work-related stress was still very much an issue.

In the Australian context, a 2006 *Construction News* article stated that the

> construction industry is not usually strongly associated with mental illness or considered to be an industry open to welfare and health-based learning programs, but in an industry high in stress, depression is an issue that should not be taken lightly because of its high personal costs and possible drain on a company's bottom line.

This article discusses a 2006 *Safety in Action* Conference in Melbourne, in which Psychologist Michael Adeney argued that "this often misunderstood illness was the source of much personal and organisational pain and loss … [however] there is still a large taboo surrounding depression and related mental illnesses." It was stated that depression not only affects the individual, but also "colleagues and the company, through absenteeism, increased staff turnover, lower productivity, poor decision making, fatigue and accident risk and poor communication." (Construction Industry News 2006). Dr Adeney concluded that while there have been a number of programs established throughout Australia to educate people about depression and mental illness, few have been specifically focused on the building and construction industry. (Those that are will be discussed in the next section.

Alarmingly, however, statistics show that suicide mortality rates in the Australian construction industry are approximately 75% higher than Australian male rates. According to figures released by the Construction and Building Industry Superannuation body (CBUS), between 1998 and 2004, the rate of possible suicides

among their membership was 43 per 100,000, in contrast to the national suicide mortality rate in Australia in 2002 of 11.8 deaths per 100,000. [10]

Impact on family and social life

"Most people are divorced … the little time I do have is always spent with wife and kids, I've got no other friends." (Statement from an employee reported in Townsend et al, 2006b, p. 13)

From the 1990s research identified irregularity of work hours – something very common to the construction industry – as "the most important variable affecting low marital quality among shift workers … [and affecting] separation and divorce rates among married people with children." (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 508) Long hours of work make it difficult to fulfill home responsibilities, often leading to a sense of emotional exhaustion. (Lingard, 2004, p. 296) Job insecurity, which is also commonplace in the construction industry due to the highly competitive tendering environment, has also been identified as having an adverse affect on marital and family relationships. (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 508). In 2004, Francis and colleagues argued that employees in both the public and private construction sector were "better at segregating and 'protecting' the work domain from family interference than vice versa … employees in our sample were more likely to make adjustments in their non-work lives to accommodate work demands." (Francis et al, 2004, p. ii) This argument of 'negative interference' was reinforced in her later work with Helen Lingard. (Lingard & Francis, 2007)

It is also argued that the nature of construction industry employment may mean working on remote sites requiring extensive travel (Townsend et al, 2006, p. 194) or frequent relocation, with the "consequence that an increasing number of dual career couples participate in 'commuter marriages'", which often result in unsatisfactory relationships. (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 508). Relocation, it is argued, also disrupts children's schooling and breaks down social and family networks, "causing greater strain and isolation." (Francis et al, 2006, p. 5)

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[10] See the OzHelp website for more detail
http://www.ozhelp.org.au/about/index.html

Issues of work-life balance and worker wellbeing in the general workforce, and sometimes specifically in the construction industry, have been raised in a variety of westernised nations, addressing a variety of potential solutions.

As early as 1998 in the UK, for example, a *Construction Task Force* was set up by the Deputy Prime Minister to undertake a major review of the UK construction industry. Among other issues, the resulting report, *Rethinking Construction,* underlined the need for much greater emphasis to be placed on the 'people dimension' in the industry. The review played an important role in improving internal communications and presenting the construction industry in a slightly different light. As one employer stated - "the industry as a whole has such a rotten reputation as an employer that we must start showing people that we value them, train them and can give them good careers." (Investors in People, 2003). In more recent years, the UK Health and Safety Executive has focused heavily on workplace stress and long hours in the construction industry. Some of its research and initiatives are discussed in this section.

In New Zealand, the Department of Labour has created a national *Work-life balance project*, which, while not directing targeted to construction, certainly tackles issues relevant to it. Similarly, in Canada, a *Work-Life Balance in Canadian Workplaces* project (part of the Canadian Government's Department of Human Resources and Social Development) provides a website to help organisations implement supportive programs so that "individuals can enjoy a healthier lifestyle while improving productivity at work."[11] A recent development in the Canadian province of Alberta, is the creation of the 2007 *Workforce Strategy for Alberta's Construction Industry.* Among other issues in this document, recognition is given to the increasing importance of work-life balance issues to workers when selecting a career or choosing to remain in jobs. It is also acknowledged that construction work has reduced appeal with its "demanding work schedules with long hours and few days of rest or required extended periods of time in remote areas, far from family and friends." With an understanding of the increasing global labour shortage, this workforce strategy sets out to "enhance the attractiveness of working in Alberta's construction industry so that workers, including mature workers, immigrants, Aboriginal Albertans and those who may experience difficulty maintaining employment, remain engaged in the industry." It seeks to achieve this through the following objectives:

- Identify and encourage the application of policies and practices to create welcoming work environments for a more diverse labour (i.e. mature workers, Aboriginal peoples, immigrants, women, persons with disabilities).
- Encourage employers to provide workplace diversity training to supervisors and other employees so they are more aware and supportive of the needs of under-represented groups in the construction workforce
- Encourage employers to adopt progressive employment practices that support the continued contribution of mature workers in the industry (i.e. part-time or flexible work arrangements, phased retirement, mature workers engaged in mentoring and training, etc.) to ensure the retention of technical and corporate knowledge in Alberta's construction industry.

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[11] See http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/lp/spila/wlb/01home.shtml).

- Develop strategies and additional supports for apprentices to complete their apprenticeship training. Identify and encourage the application of best practices in apprentice training and support to improve retention.
- Identify and promote strategies to improve work-life balance for workers in Alberta's construction industry and make employment in the industry more attractive to potential and existing workers. (A Workforce Strategy for Alberta's Construction Industry, 2007)

Scandinavian countries are also advancing in this area, with numerous work-life balance initiatives. For example, the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health (an administrative sector of the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health) promotes "work safety, occupational health and wellbeing at work," with a particular focus on a number of industries, including construction. (Finnish Institute, 2006)

In Spain, an examination of family-friendly work practices revealed that a number of factors influenced the implementation of such programs. These included the local demand, the size of the organisation, the percentage of female employees, and the availability of skilled labour. The implications of this Spanish investigation are that an industry with a low percentage of females would be unlikely to instigate wellbeing programs with any sense of urgency. However, it could be predicted that that same organisation would be more enthusiastic about doing so if they faced a shortage of labour. (Poelmans, et al, 2003)

In the Australian construction industry, it might be argued, the low numbers of women and the relatively attractive high wages in commercial construction have worked against the implementation of work-life programs. However, it was claimed in 2005 that "the number of building industry organisations now involved in work/life initiatives is increasing rapidly". But the question remained as to how much value employers placed on the concept. (Building Commission, 2005, p. 8) This statement was based on results from a 2004 study report, *Snapshot 2004: Work and family practices in the construction industry*, conducted by Polish and Carroll Recruitment. The study involved a national survey of 150 construction organisations and 12 face-to-face interviews of employers. However, the question of how representative of the industry the responding sample was has been raised. Indeed, Polish and Carroll stated that "there is an assumption that the responding organisations self selected as leading organisations in the area of work and family. Some organisations that declined the invitation to participate suggested the survey was not yet relevant." (Polish & Carroll, 2004, p. 4) The results of the survey reaffirmed some of the issues that face the industry (long hours, client deadlines, and job insecurity due to the cyclical nature of construction etc.) and the steps that some companies had taken to address them. The most widespread initiatives were identified as – flexible hours; remote work; part-time work; and paid maternity leave (largely secretarial staff rather than technical or professional employees). While other initiatives were mentioned in the report (e.g. Employee Assistance Programs and social functions), the central focus rested on time-related responses. Without doubt, this approach is not uncommon (as discussed in the following paragraphs), but it is only one of a variety of approaches that have been explored across other industries and in other countries.

Reduced or more flexible working hours

" (the five-day week) … it makes you feel better inside, because you are thinking "I've got the Saturday off" and you think "oh great" and it makes you do your job better, you feel more comfortable, and you're happier doing what you're doing.

Makes a difference." (Statement from a salaried worker as reported in Townsend et al, 2006b, p. 13)

The 2004 *Snapshot* study (discussed above) indicated that of those organisations surveyed, over 60% had practices that centred on flexibility of hours. (Polish & Carroll, 2004, p. 10)

In 2005, a study of an alliance construction project in Queensland investigated organisational factors relating to employees' work-life balance. The benefits of an alliance project in which more than one organisation cooperates in developing a tender, according to Townsend and colleagues, is that there is a common association with such projects and "flexibility, innovation and collaboration between organisations with different skills." (Townsend et al, 2006, p. 196). The alliance delivery model "seeks to overcome the adversarial relationships that have historically existed in the construction industry." (Turner, 2007, p. 4) Over the life of this particular alliance project, the site manager introduced a range of initiatives designed to improve the work-life balance of workers. This included compressing the working week from 6 shorter days to 5 eleven hour days. While results of the project were generally positive, one worker felt a sense of betrayal due to a promise that management had made that a compressed work week would not make staff any worse off financially, when reality proved different. Most wages staff, however, indicated that "they would rather have the time with their families than have the extra money." (Bradley et al, 2006, p. 7) It was also noted in the findings from this project that the reduced working hours did not adversely affect the project timelines. Indeed, not only did the project not go over time or budget, it was completed six months early and came in under budget. (Bradley et al, 2006, p. 7)

Also writing in 2006, Townsend and colleagues presented findings from two construction industry alliance case studies that had experimented with restructuring working time arrangements. Both studies implemented a compressed 5-day week (with additional daily hours to compensate for the loss of income from no Saturday work). However, after only four months one of the projects reverted to a 6-day week. As indicated in the study above, this decision related to waged workers experiencing a loss of earnings despite attempts to 'make-up' for the loss of Saturday work. The situation was exacerbated by labour market pressures when another construction site opened nearby offering a 6-day week and, by implication, higher pay. (Townsend et al, 2006a, p. 196). Consequently the alliance project lost approximately one third of their waged workforce. It was also argued that those workers who did not leave, or those that had been recruited to make up the shortfall, were not 'quality' workers and the flow-on effect of this had been a fall in meeting scheduling targets. (Townsend et al, 2006b, p. 9-10) To 'compensate' salaried workers for the loss of the 5-day week, a roster system was introduced, involving working only one in every four Saturdays rather than every Saturday.

A further case study discussed in a recently released paper, involved the implementation of another type of roster system. This involved employees beginning work 30 minutes earlier every morning and only working one Saturday a month. Townsend explains:

> The accumulated penalty rates meant that on a monthly cycle the employees would receive approximately $30 more take-home pay, although there was only the one weekly 'spike' in take home pay due to the Saturday penalty rates. When the employees did work on Saturday it was following a rostered day off on the previous Monday, hence, still a five day working week. (Townsend et al, 2008, p. 8)

However, given that the scheme was only implemented in September 2007, the impact of the roster has not yet been evaluated.

In the UK, some similar pilot studies have been implemented to address long working hours and work-life conflict in the construction industry. As reported in *Personnel Today* magazine in July 2005, the UK construction firm ISG Interior Exterior decided to run a series of on-site pilot schemes to try to improve the work-life balance of its employees. This pre-empted the European Union *Working Time Directive*. The first pilot scheme was completed during a new-build project at Goldsmith's College in London and according to company head of HR, it was great success - "we asked staff what they wanted to change. Not working at weekends and doing their hours during weekdays was the main suggestion … There is a very strong business case for this - it is vital for commercial success in a very competitive market." (Berry, 2005).

The New Zealand government has also sought to address work-life balance issues, with the initiation of the *New Zealand Work-Life Balance Project*. The issue of long hours, family obligations and flexible work hours across the general workforce has been addressed as part of this initiative. Recently passed in parliament, the Employment Relations (Flexible Working Arrangements) Amendment Act (to be implemented on 1 July 2008) seeks to provide certain employees with the right to request a variation to their hours of work, days of work, or place of work. To be eligible, an "employee must have the care of any person and have been employed by their employer for 6 months prior to making the request." A review of the operation and effects of the new legislation will be instigated in two years and will include recommendations on whether the provisions should be extended to all employees. (Department of Labour, NZ, 2007a)

The New Zealand government has also implemented a series of guides for employers about a number of issues relating to long hours and how to address them. For example, in 2007, the Department of Labour produced *Managing shift work to minimise workplace fatigue: a guide for employers*, which outlines the implications of fatigue in the workplace and how to manage them to reduce the negative impacts. Strategies include implementation of effective shift work policies and realistic hours of work, monitoring employee health and ensuring two-way communication. (Department of Labour, NZ, 2007b)

In 2007 it was reported that some Australian construction organisations had begun to move from six to five-day working weeks, but that the full impact of compressing the working week, whether positive or negative, had yet to be thoroughly evaluated. For example, wrote Lingard and Francis:

> there are some suggestions that employees work the same number of hours over five, rather than six days, resulting in fatigue. Strain-based work issues, including employees' subjective sense of having too much to do in the time available and emotional exhaustion also need to be addressed." (Lingard & Francis, 2007, p. 90)

One suggestion presented by Lingard and Francis for the implementation of time management programs that might help employees to work more productively, as well as "providing them with the confidence to go home at the end of the working day, leaving unfinished tasks for the following day." (Lingard & Francis, 2007, p. 90) In the 2004 Snapshot study it was revealed that many employees felt that they had to "prove themselves" before requesting flexibility; that they needed time (sometimes 1 to 2 years of service) to develop the trust required to feel comfortable making requests. (Polish & Carroll, 2004, p. 10)

Other studies indicate that employees have suggested implementing legislation that demands construction industry contracts be offered based on a five-day working week. However, it is argued that

> state regulation is unlikely, particularly within the current Australian industrial relations transformation to a more flexible and individualistic approach and the Australian government's policy and legislative shift of decision-making and control to the workplace level … there is unlikely to be agreement between construction industry companies when large competitive projects are proposed. (Townsend et al, 2006, p. 198)

Burgess and Connell argue that

> the shift in the industrial relations system over the past 15 years is away from collective norms towards individual bargaining with recent legislation attempting to exclude trade unions from the workplace. While work family balance remains a perennial justification for the legislative changes, the reality is that both collective and individual agreement making has failed to deliver arrangements that allow workers to facilitate work and family balance. (Burgess & Connell, 2006, p. 96)

A further argument relates to peer-pressure and the entrenched culture of long hours and a six-day week in the construction industry. Despite some Australian studies reporting a sense from employees that there is a "'groundswell' of peer pressure to reduce working hours," it seems that cultural attitudes are not easily overcome. (Townsend et al, 2006a, p. 199) In the 2005 Queensland study, for example, it was noted that it was not compulsory for waged staff to work on Saturdays, but, argued Lingard, "working overtime is accepted as part of the culture of the construction industry, and a mechanism workers use to cope financially with fluctuations in demand for their labour." (Lingard, 2005). Employees in some studies reported "pressure to be at work on Saturdays, even if there's nothing to do except read the paper." (Townsend et al, 2006a, p. 199) This idea of 'presenteeism' was common, despite the fact that many employees reported that on Saturdays "productivity was often sub-optimal." A 2007 alliance study in Victoria added weight to this argument, with one employee referring to the 'walk of shame" if you were required to leave because of a sick child – "it just stresses you out." (Turner, 2007, p. 15) A key to improving work-life balance, argued Lingard and colleagues in 2006, was "learning the ability to say "no" and feel comfortable about leaving work at the end of the work day." (Lingard et al, 2006 p. 613-4)

These concerns are not unique to the construction industry. For example, in 2006, an extensive survey of a broad range of UK employees indicated that there was a strong perception that "those who reduce their hours are generally viewed as less committed to their work and more likely to be overlooked for promotion, thus discouraging employees to take-up work-life balance policies for fear of limiting their career development. " (Daniels & French, 2006, p. 154) Edgar also argues that many workplaces are based on an old industrial model, in which if you did not work full-time, you lacked commitment." (Edgar, 2005, p. 129)

But it seems that it is not just employees who find difficulty in breaking cultural habits. In the UK, some employers were also unwilling to accept a change in cultural norms. Concerned about the possible impact of the "dreaded" *Working Time Directive* and the potential for a reduction in hours, one particular employer protested that this would "massively affect our profits." (Wilde, 2007)

Others have argued that not only will a reduction of hours be hard to achieve –

"once committed to long hours of work, it is hard to envisage a different schedule" - but that it is not the answer. In the UK in 2005, the Maxim recruitment company argued that

> the issue of work-life balance is not solely concerned with the number of hours a person works. There are those who work relatively long hours and do not suffer the all too familiar effects of work-related stress. There are those who work part time and suffer a great deal. It is the role of construction industry employers to ensure that the expectations of the company culture match the expectations of the candidates being shortlisted for the job. (Maxim Recruitment UK 2005).

In the United States, Ganster and Bates argued in 2003 that, despite the long-held belief that excessive work hours exact a significant toll on general wellbeing, they found that the number of hours worked had "very small or non-existent effects on measures of well being such as life satisfaction, sick days, and stress symptoms." Furthermore, although long hours do have an effect on work stress and family-work conflict, "it appears that high quality work and supportive workplace cultures are much more important determinants of general well being than are work hours." (Ganster & Bates, 2003)

Flexibility, family-friendly programs and the power of perception

"the highly decentralised nature of construction operations creates the possibility that informal policies are experienced differently ... negative responses from supervisors or managers at a local or project level could even outweigh the positive effects of benefit provision at the organisational level." (Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1055)

Research undertaken in the 1980s, and continued until the present day, has recognised that the implementation of family-friendly work policies could enhance productivity, morale and efficiency within the implementing organisation. (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 508; Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1047) Companies with family-supportive benefits were discovered to have "lower turnover intentions, regardless of whether the employee individually benefited from the policy ... because they signified corporate concerns for employee wellbeing." (Lingard & Francis, 2005b, p. 734) These benefits and policies, it is argued, "could mitigate the adverse effects of the long and irregular hours that prevail in the industry." (Lingard & Francis, 2005b, p. 744). Other researchers have even argued that there is a positive relationship between the announcement of organisational work-life benefit initiatives and shareholder returns, indicating a favourable view of such initiatives among investors (Arthur, 2003 as discussed in Lingard & Francis, 2005a).

It is also asserted that work-life benefits are viewed favourably by employees regardless of whether they are likely to use them or not. For example, in a 2001 study of "global employee perceptions" of the workplace, it was claimed that positive responses among employees related significantly to the number of family-friendly benefits offered by the organisation, and perceived family support from supervisors. The results, it is argued, highlight the important role that perceptions of the overall work environment play in determining employee reactions to family-friendly benefit policies. (Allen, 2001). A study of family-friendly policies in police in the United States also found that "availability (vs. usage) of family-friendly policies may be more important in stressful jobs" and that researchers need to examine the benefits of merely *offering* programs versus requiring or encouraging their usage. (Youngcourt & Huffman, 2005)

Perceived flexibility in the workplace, allowing greater integration between work and home life and some level of worker control, is seen as a key principle "associated with higher levels of engagement, retention, job satisfaction and employee wellbeing." (Bourke & Russell, 2007, p. 32) Contrary to the belief that "a commitment to family demonstrates a lack of commitment to work," research has found that "a person's commitment to their role as spouse and parent actually enhanced work outcomes. This occurred because of reduced levels of strain and anxiety." (Bourke & Russell, 2007, p. 36)

Perceptions and the knowledge that flexibility was there whether it was used or not were also an important aspect of the 2005 alliance project in Queensland, with staff interviews highlighting the perception that,

> management assumed that people generally worked hard, so that if they did want to take some personal time, it was probably deserved. Further, just about all employees expressed the view that they would not take this personal time very often, but they felt that if it was important to them, and they needed the time, then they could take the time and management would support them. This is important from a project management point of view too…This means that managers do not need to fear that if they provide employees with flexibility then those employees will take advantage of that. The opposite in fact seemed true. The fact that employees felt that they could take time if they needed to, and were trusted in relation to this, actually led them to wanting to do this very minimally. They reported a greater sense of gratitude to management, and therefore did not want to let them down...Overall, the project was on- time and on- budget. In this way, a two-way approach to flexibility by managers and workers secured greater work-life balance satisfaction and also achieved significant productivity gains in relation to the project. (Bradley et al, 2006, p. 5)

Previous work, referenced by Bradley and others, highlighted the fact that evidence suggests that even when some organisations appear to be family-friendly, an uncooperative manager can easily counteract this "if they send negative signals." (Bradley et al, 2006, p. 6; Daniels & French, 2006, p. 154) This argument was reinforced by Burgess and Connell, who stated that "even though work/family programs may be in place it can be difficult for employees to access them with the two biggest obstacles being staff shortages and managerial opposition. (Burgess & Connell, 2006, p. 95)

Lingard and Francis also raised this issue, arguing that work-life benefits are only symbolic of organisational commitment if they are usable. It is important to recognise, they argue that

> Although work-life benefit programs create new ways of working, organisational cultures may still reward old ways of working with the result that employees who use work-life benefits are negatively affected. (Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1055)

It would seem that if they are to be effective, work-life, or family-friendly initiatives need to be more than tokenistic. They must be supported and implemented with conviction.

Supportive, consultative environment

"While client expectations and deadlines must be satisfied we have found the benefits that flow from practices geared to work and family balance deliver better client service, improved employee commitment and moral and higher staff retention" (Employer statement quoted in Polish & Carroll, 2004, p. 22)

Research in the last two decades has highlighted the fact that employee commitment to an organisation goes beyond the availability of work-life benefits and is more strongly related to a belief in a supportive work environment. (Butler et al, 2003; Allen, 2001; Thompson et al, 1999). Organisational culture plays a powerful role in the impact of wellbeing programs. As Valerie Francis argued in 2004, "factors embedded in the organisational culture can undermine these policies rendering them ineffective." (Francis, 2004, p. 1)

Some researchers argue that informal means of organisational work-family support can be as effective, if not more so, than formal support (i.e. benefits approved by an individual supervisor rather than proscribed by the company). (Behson, 2005) The benefits of informal support include increased satisfaction with decreased employee stress, work-family conflict, and turnover intentions. The UK Chartered Institute of Building 2006 survey results revealed that the most commonly cited factor for helping to cope with stress was "support from colleagues (81%)." (Campbell, 2006, p. 10) Results of a two surveys in the Australian construction industry in 2004 and 2005 indicated that those employees who believed their organisation to be supportive were less likely to feel emotionally exhausted, had higher levels of organisational commitment and lower intentions to quit. (Francis, 2004; Francis, 2005; Lingard & Francis, 2006)

However, Lingard and Francis argue that the research into the real impact of organisational support is varied, with some studies indicating that social support from supervisors and work colleagues acts as "a protective buffer in the relationship between work stress and burnout" (Reynolds, 2005), while other studies "report no evidence of a moderating effect." (Lingard & Francis, 2006, p. 187) The reasons for this, it is suggested, may be that researchers are measuring different *types* of support – either practical or emotional. They continue:

> the former type of support is demonstrated by listening and being sympathetic to employees' difficulties, whereas the latter type of support involves offering practical assistance to help employees to resolve their difficulties. (Lingard & Francis, 2006, p. 188)

Their 2005 study of 202 public and private sector project-based and managerial employees therefore set out to investigate not only the impact of social support, but also what *types* of social support were important in moderating between conflict and burnout. The results of their study reveal some differences with other studies, perhaps, they suggest for cultural reasons:

> in the culture of the construction industry, emotional support from co-workers and supervisors does not have a moderating effect on the relationship between work-family conflict and emotional exhaustion. However, practical support from both co-workers and supervisors does have a moderating effect. (Lingard & Francis, 2006, p. 194)

They conclude that, in the Australian construction industry, merely listening and sympathising with worker difficulties, while important, would not be sufficient, but that it is necessary to provide more tangible practical assistance. Nonetheless, they

also argue that supervisors should be provided with sensitivity training, largely to assist in reducing criticism and resentment of employee's family obligations, which can have significant negative impact. (Francis, 2004, p. 7; Lingard & Francis, 2006, p. 194)

The role of management and open and effective communication, in terms of supporting workers and committing to programs, is seen by many as critical to the successful implementation of work-life balance initiatives. (Polish & Carroll, 2004, p. 22) The 2005 study of an alliance construction project in Queensland (discussed earlier in relation to a compressed work week) revealed that employees regarded the attitudes of management as a key factor in determining the extent of their work-life balance. (Bradley et al, 2006) Opportunity for open discussion and negotiation with management, such as a willingness to adapt 'traditional' ways of working, was directly related to wellbeing and a more productive workforce. More generally, Bourke and Russell also discuss the importance of transparency and 'mutuality' - an open conversation between employee and management "around identifying agreed goals and parameters, and then brainstorming workable solutions." (Bourke & Russell, 2007, p. 36).

More importantly, workers in the 2005 Queensland study recognised the commitment of their project manager, who participated in RDO activities and who incorporated the ideals of work-life balance in his own life. This commitment seemed integral to implementing change. As Bradley and colleagues argue, previous studies have highlighted that "work-place initiatives of any sort are likely to fail if they do not have the full support of all levels of management." (Bradley et al, 2006, p. 6). Bourke and Russell also spoke of the importance of management commitment, stating that managers should be given the confidence to implement work-life balance initiatives and to think of workplace flexibility as "a business enabler." (Bourke & Russell, 2007, p. 33)

In 2005, a study of a large sample of Canadian workers reinforced this argument, concluding that the findings "make a compelling case for the notion that it is not enough for employers merely to offer alternative work arrangements", awareness among supervisors must be raised and an organisational culture created "that is supportive of promoting work-life balance." (Julien et al, 2006)

In 2005, construction company *Probuild* put this concept of creating a supportive culture into practice, through a Victorian State Government *Better Work and Family* Grant. Working with both salaried and wages staff, the company created a work and life balance strategy, including a package of guidelines. They also acknowledged that their managers were crucial to success and would require support. According to one member of the work-life team, the development of the program had been a major milestone, but "the hard work has just begun: now we move towards achieving a real change in our culture, where we will need to change some long-held assumptions about how work is done in this industry." (Building Commission, 2006, p. 16)

In the UK context, in 2005, Maxim Recruitment offered some practical advice to construction industry managers to achieve a "healthier work-life balance for your staff without appearing to have 'gone soft' and ensuring competitive advantage is gained rather than lost." The authors argue that the issue of freedom to control working hours, and the allocation of time is of critical importance - employees need to introduce some control back into their lives. Those who generally feel their working lives are out of control are much more likely to feel ill than those who feel relatively in control. (Maxim, 2005). More recently, an article released by the UK Institute of

Employment Studies Institute stated that "contrary to 'macho' stereotypes about workers in the construction industry, a recent work-related health awareness pilot for the UK construction industry has shown that it is middle management that needs the most encouragement to make changes – workers are actually very concerned about their health." The research showed, for example, that the training that the *Constructing Better Health* program offered, which was aimed at managers, was rarely taken up. These same managers were, however, often very supportive and proactive in putting forward their workers for training. (IES, 2007)

Physical health and psychological support

"The industry being predominantly male is not known for its approach to healthy behaviour and positive wellbeing …The push for men in particular to be medically and mentally healthy is important in an industry where males generally hold a more flippant view on aspects of their health."[12]

According to the 2006 Victorian report on workplace stress, Europe and the UK are "providing international leadership on taking a systems approach to stress." (LaMontagne et al, 2006, p. 21). More specifically, others argue, when it comes to workplace health and safety in the construction industry, the United Kingdom has researched more extensively and invested more heavily than both the United States and Australia. (Fleming et al, 2006, p. 48) For example, in relation to health and workplace stress, the UK Health and Safety Executive (HSE) initiative *Tackling work-related stress*, was implemented in 2001, providing advice to construction workers about healthy eating, limiting alcohol consumption and cigarettes, and seeking support from family and friends "to raise concerns at work." However, it was noted in the leaflets associated with the campaign that this advice would "not prevent work-related stress, but may help you take care of yourself and ensure that you don't make the problem worse." (HSE, 2001)

In 2004, the HSE implemented the *Constructing Better Health* (CBH) initiative - a workplace health scheme for all sectors of the UK construction industry. The broad aim of the scheme is "protecting and improving the health of all UK construction workers for whom health outcomes are often significantly worse than other occupational groups." (Machen, 2007). CBH operates with stakeholders from across the industry to ensure a practical, workable solution that improves workers' health. Significantly, during the pilot phase of the scheme, between October 2004 and July 2006, more than 1700 construction workers took advantage of CBH's free and confidential health checks. One third of those tested were referred and advised on ways to improve their health. (CBH, 2007) The results of health checks, according to the Institute for Employment Studies (IES),

> demonstrated the importance of health awareness to an industry with high levels of work-related illness and workplace injuries, as well as expected future skills shortages. One-third had occupational health issues as a consequence of noise and vibration; while one-third were also found to have general health problems, most commonly related to high blood pressure or respiratory issues. (IES, 2007)

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[12] Quoted from a media release. 25 October 2007. *Local established construction company wins OHS excellence award*

http://www.chiefminister.act.gov.au/media.asp?media=3053&section=52&title=Media%20Release&id=52

However, a June 2007 evaluation of the scheme, undertaken by the IES, reported that "while employees in the sector are interested in understanding more about their own health and how to protect it, there was 'deeply held unwillingness' on the part of managers to take action to improve health outcomes for their employees … the greatest challenge will, as always, be working with those at the top of organisations to influence change." (Machen, 2007) Indeed, a UK survey conducted in 2007 revealed that 21% of employees surveyed felt that their employer thought that "healthy working is either nothing to do with them, a waste of time or that the term simply doesn't mean anything." (Ipsos MORI, 2007)

Continuing with the focus on work-related stress, an extensive research study was launched in 2006 by the UKChartered Institute of Buildings to investigate health issues relating to occupational stress in the industry. The results of an employee survey indicated that some of the most common factors that helped industry professionals cope with stress were their life outside of work, regular exercise, taking regular time out of the office and team building events. (Campbell, 2006, p. 11)

In the Australia, context, it is argued that "while it has long been recognised that workplaces expose workers to physical and chemical hazards, researchers have only recently begun to expose the health impact of long hours and psycho-social stressors." (Lingard et al, 2006 p. 609) The OzHelp Foundation - a joint venture developed in 2003 between the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, the Master Builders Association, and the Federal and ACT health and planning ministers – has proved very successful in helping to educate the construction industry about drug and alcohol abuse, mental health and suicide prevention in the industry, with particular focus on apprentices. It is argued that OzHelp "not only acts to prevent the tragedy of suicide in our community, it also directly improves such things as OH&S, apprentice retention in the industry and general productivity in the workplace." (Construction Industry News, 2006). In 2007 the OzHelp Foundation was announced as the winner of the ACT Best Workplace Health and Wellbeing Program, continuing to be "at the forefront of health and wellbeing in the construction industry in Canberra." It was also noted that

> employers are recognising the benefits to be gained by not only ensuring that the workplace is safe but is also a place where employees feel valued and supported. It is also argued that 'the state of health and well being of staff has been recognised as having the potential to be a substantial cost to organisations.' [13]

A Victorian construction industry support program was also developed in 2006, to combat the high rate of suicide among young male building workers in drought-stricken rural areas. The *Life Care* support scheme was designed to provide apprentices and young workers with mental health support services and suicide prevention advice, and to " get the message across to young members that it's OK to seek help and help your mates if they need help." [14]

Another successful Australian initiative is the Building Trades Group (BTG) Drug and Alcohol Rehabilitation Program established in the 1990s out of growing concerns

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[13] Quoted from a media release. 25 October 2007. *Local established construction company wins OHS excellence award*

http://www.chiefminister.act.gov.au/media.asp?media=3053&section=52&title=Media%20Release&id=52

[14] Reported on http://www.news.com.au/story/0,23599,20836130-1702,00.html, 28 November 2006

"that the abuse of alcohol and other drugs in the building industry was not being confronted, and was leading to accidents and an unsafe workplace." The program is now being implemented nationally, providing education and treatment options and achieving a high level of acceptance within the industry. It is now a standard inclusion in all Enterprise Bargain Agreements negotiated in NSW, Queensland and the ACT. [15] It has also been recognised by the United Nations as a "best-practice model to be recommended to policymakers and practitioners internationally." (Fraser, 2007, p. 19) Importantly, the program was developed by workers for workers and uses peer education strategies to emphasise the impact on all workers of unsafe behaviour caused by drug and alcohol abuse. (Fraser, 2007, p. 18)

In South Australia another successful program was implemented in 2004aimed at improving employee health and wellbeing for men in large corporations. The program covered major health concerns (e.g. heart disease, stroke, prostate and bowel cancer), as well as general wellbeing, diet and exercise. The program also included education on psychological issues, including "the effects of shift work on remote relationships and the family unit." (Workcover SA, 2004)

Solutions related to specific age groups/life-phases

"Helping employees to meet these [non-work] obligations will require more flexible 'cafeteria-style' benefit programs that can be suited to individual and changing needs." (Lingard & Sublet, 2002, p. 515)

It is now widely understood that people's values, family and work expectations change as they progress through various stages of family life and that many work environments need to cater for a diverse and multi-generational workforce with different 'life-stage' requirements. (Harrington, 2007, p. 12) In 2000, for example, one group of researchers noted that the majority of research associated with work-family conflict focussed on married individuals, but "given the growing number of single-parent homes, it seems important to also examine the effects of work-family conflict on this segment of the population." (Allen, 2000, p. 302). A more recent research paper affirms this gap in the research, stating that it is not yet clear how well supported childless employees feel within their organisation. Anecdotal evidence, it is argued, suggests that this segment of the workforce "may even resent the provision of work-life programs." (Turner, 2007, p. 7)

More recently, Pitt-Catsouphes, and colleagues have written about the 21st century multi-generational workplace, arguing that in the US, many employers have started to assess how age might affect the success of their strategies for recruitment, retention, training and development. Quoting from a 2005 report, the authors conclude that "differences in attitudes, values, workstyles and expectations ... [can] also cause miscommunication and misunderstandings, impact productivity and dampen the effect of teamwork and collaboration so critical to organisational effectiveness." (Pitt-Catsouphes et al, 2007, p. 9). Effective managers must ensure that they explore both the challenges and opportunities of age diversity to maximise business productivity.

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[15] See http://www.btgda.org.au/

In a 2006 article produced by an Australian mining industry journal, focus was given to the changing demographics of the workforce and how to address work-life balance in Australia and Canada. It was claimed that for the next several decades in both those countries, for every two employees who are eligible to retire there would be less than one employee to take their place, so competition for skilled workers will be particularly fierce. In the Australian context, the author writes:

> Australia's claim to fame is as a global leader in workloads, and Western Australia is probably the worst, with unpaid overtime and burnout common … [Australia] faces a clash of the expectations of the different generations, with baby boomers and generations X and Y all looking at the workplace differently … baby boomers have become like 'boiled frogs', slowly letting the workloads increase over the past 15 years, while the youngsters are saying 'hang on — the water is too hot'. If employers cannot offer them the correct balance, Australia risks losing its youth — you just can't keep offering them more money. (Lewis, 2006)

In her 2004 study of construction engineers, Lingard was very conscious of different demographic sub-groups (single, married, childless, parents etc.), but noted that there were no significant differences observed in the *level* of burnout experienced by the different these demographic groups (Lingard, 2004, p. 297) Nonetheless, there were differences in the *predictors* of burnout within each of these groups. Given this, over years of research Lingard has argued that construction organisations need to pay attention to the types of work-life balance initiatives that they offer; that different employees will value different initiatives depending on their current life experiences (e.g. parents compared to non-parents) – no one size fits all. (Lingard & Sublet, 2002; Lingard, 2004, p. 296; Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1053)

Lingard reinforced this argument in 2005 in a study of project-based and managerial employees (both public and private sector[16]) undertaken with Valerie Francis. In this work they stated that "there is still a lack of consensus about whether the positive effect of work-life benefits is universal (i.e. experienced by all employees, irrespective of their individual characteristics or circumstances) or whether the effect of work-life benefits differs for particular sub-populations of employees." (Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1047) Given this, Lingard and Francis argue that due to the sometimes costly implementation of work-life benefits, employers need to be sure that they understand the preferences of their own employees before putting any policies and practices into action. (Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1048). Both Francis and Reynolds stated that any initiated policies will need to be carefully tailored to suit the life stages of employees. Employees of different ages and generations experience different problems in balancing work and non-work life and have different preferences for organisational work-life balance initiatives. Implementation of work life policies can also support the diversification of the construction workforce. (Reynolds, 2005; Francis et al, 2006, p.29) A 2007 Hudson report on engaging and retaining staff also argued that successful strategies would have flexible benefits "that are tailored to their individual work/life situations." (Hudson, 2007, p. 18)

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[16] Of the 202 who responded, 63 where from the private sector and 139 from the public sector. This represented a response rate of 605 for the private sector and 28% for the public sector. (Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1049).

While exploring the work-life benefit preferences by age within the sample, results can be summarised as follows:

- Employees in the **50-59** year age group expressed the strongest preference for *crisis support* initiatives, and employees in the 60+ year age group expressed the lowest preference for these initiatives.
- Employees in the **40-49** year age group expressed the strongest preference for *childcare support* initiatives, and employees in the 60+ year age group, not surprisingly, expressed the lowest preference for these initiatives.
- Employees in the **30-39** year age group expressed the strongest preference for *alternative work arrangements*, and employees in the 60+ year age group expressed the lowest preference for these initiatives.
- Employees in the **20-29** year age group expressed the strongest preference for *wellness and personal development* initiatives, and employees in the 60+ year age group expressed the lowest preference for these initiatives. (Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1050)

According to Brad Harrington, from the Boston Center, "the increasing number of older workers has become an extremely high profile issue." (Harrington, 2007, p. 12). In Australia, the Government report *Workforce Tomorrow: Adapting to a More Diverse Australian Labour Market* (2005 – 2010) is designed to analyse the impact of ageing on labour supply and on employment by industry, region, occupation, and skills. As Hudson reported in 2007 "the skills shortage confronting employers is expected to worsen under the impact of changing population demographics, in particular Australia's ageing workforce. The number of working Australians aged over 65 will increase rapidly over the coming years, resulting in more "baby boomers" retiring and workforce participation rates decreasing further." (Hudson, 2007, p. 4) The intention of the Government report is to assist employers in developing strategies to deal with their workforce needs over this period. It was written in response to the recognition that, while Australia is in a phase of accelerated ageing, it is also experiencing excess demand for many skilled occupations, resulting in a labour shortfall. To address this, the government has instituted two main areas of policy implementation. These are the welfare-to-work reforms and the workplace relations changes. (Burgess & Connell, 2006, p. 96).

According to research gathered from the Australian Bureau of Statistics by *Skillsinfo*, the age profile of the construction industry is relatively young in comparison with the rest of the workforce. In 2006, the median age of workers in construction was 37 years, compared with 39 years for all industries. The construction industry has a relatively low share of workers aged 45 years and over. In 2007, just below one third (32.5 per cent) of workers in the construction industry were aged 45 years and over, which was lower than the average of 37.1 per cent for all industries. Merely 1.8 per cent of construction workers were aged 65 years and over, "reflecting the physical nature of work for most occupations in the construction industry." (Skillsinfo, 2007, p. 6)

However, in the 10 years to 2007, it is indicated that all of the age groups in the construction industry experienced employment growth. Workers aged between 55 and 64 years experienced the strongest employment growth in the 10 years to 2007 (up by 129.7 per cent). Although they represent a smaller proportion of the construction workforce, workers aged between 15 and 19 years also experienced strong growth (114.9 per cent) over the same period. In recent years, the Construction industry has, unlike many other industries, experienced an influx of workers in all age groups and "is well-placed to adapt to workforce ageing". (Skillsinfo, 2007, p. 7)

A 2007 report prepared by NCVER in conjunction with the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Engineering Union (CFMEU) investigated older workers' perspectives on their training and retention in the South Australian construction industry. It concluded that

> the policy priority is to address the obstacles, constraints and disincentives that deter, constrain or prevent older workers from working beyond their "normal" retirement age. A substantial majority of older workers believe that older workers face discrimination in the workforce, but less of them report discriminatory attitudes from their colleagues and employers. (Lundberg & Marshallsay, 2007, p. 22).

Among other areas, older workers believed that they needed fairer access to training programs to enable them to update their skills, to keep up with developments in technology, and to equip older workers to train or mentor younger workers. (Lundberg & Marshallsay, 2007).

In the UK, similar research has been undertaken. For example, in 2006 the Centre for Research into the Older Workforce released a report called *Managing an ageing workforce in construction: A report for employers* to help employers to make better use of older workers. It outlines the fact that the construction sector in the UK faces serious labour and skills shortages, which are likely to increase. The industry also has a high proportion of workers over 55. Given this, the report argues, "a greater or more flexible use of older workers may help." However, it is noted that attitudes to older workers in the sector are mixed, with construction companies generally more willing to allow employees to stay in work past retirement age than other sectors, but they are less likely to recruit staff over 50, perhaps reflecting the time needed to train and become competent for new entrants. (McNair & Flynn 2006).

The UK organisation Strategic Promotion of Ageing Research Capacity (SPARC) has also established a project called *Ageing in construction workers* to understand better the abilities and needs of older workers, and to see how they fit within the changing workplaces of the construction industry. An abstract on the SPARC website states that –

> The need for this work has resulted from the construction industry's skills shortage – the early retirement of workers from the physically demanding workloads present in the construction industry being compounded by school leavers and graduates seeing the industry as 'dirty and dangerous' and seeking more appealing forms of employment.

However, some preliminary findings have revealed that the attractions of "employing young, cheap immigrant labour far outweigh any desire by the industry to take care of its older workers. In effect, the taxpayer picks up the cost of workplace induced sickness, ill-health and injury. There is little incentive to make the workplace more hospitable."[17]

As well as acknowledging the reality of an ageing workforce, the construction industry has been made equally aware of the need to attract and retain its young apprentices, as well as the need to address the health and wellbeing issues that had lead to the creation of such programs as OzHelp. Working to support Group Training Companies (GTOs), OzHelp has developed the 'LifeSkills Toolbox' training designed

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[17] See http://www.sparc.ac.uk/workshops/2007-01-22-health-workplace-design-and-the-older-worker/

to help build resilience in the apprentices. The Course covers 48 hours of Training over the 4 years of the apprenticeship. OzHelp is also planning a mentoring and support skills program for industry leaders to raise the suicide awareness in the workplace. [18]

A multiple program approach

"any efforts aimed at impacting work-life integration need to be seen as a cultural change process ... simply put, policies and programs are necessary, but not sufficient." (Harrington, 2007, p. 13)

In her 2004 study of Australian engineers and burnout, Helen Lingard noted that burnout often resulted in a combination of issues that were both work and non-work related. As such, she argued, companies interested in developing burnout prevention programs "should not focus solely on stressors originating in the work environment because this will only address part of the problem ... strategies will need to adopt a more holistic approach to helping employees achieve a satisfactory work-life balance." (Lingard, 2004, p. 296) In the Australian context, Chris Reynolds also argued that the industry needs a variety of initiatives to support a diverse workforce. He provides some examples of some potential initiatives including:

- work design (reducing evening and weekend working, flexible rostering, flexible working hours/days, multiskilling and job enrichment);
- time management;
- fitness and wellbeing programs (gym membership and healthy eating programs);
- coaching and mentor schemes (team building, leadership training);
- culture (team social activities, newsletters, recognition of employees achievements outside of work, child care services; health care services). (Reynolds, 2005)

In 2004, Valerie Francis produced a summary of some of the findings from her study of the construction industry in Australia, in collaboration with Helen Lingard. Suggested remedies for work-life balance in the private sector include: develop strategies to improve employees' control over their work arrangements; ways to reduce work hours; "develop a work culture more conducive to work-life balance." The article emphasises the importance of a supportive culture - management and co-workers, both physically and emotionally. Results suggest that no single work–life balance solution is applicable to all employees – it recommends workforce profiling for identifying the most beneficial and highly valued initiatives. "Care should also be taken to consider strategies that may not be a priority for existing employees but which might be implemented in order to attract groups of employees who are not currently well represented to improve workforce diversity." (Francis, 2004b, pp. 10-11)

In the following year, Francis and Lingard presented a case study of project-based and professional construction workers, also undertaken in Queensland, which highlighted the fact that when exploring various work-life initiatives,

> there appears to be some conceptual link between childcare support, alternative work arrangements and crisis assistance/support. It is possible that these types of work-life benefit are mutually supportive,

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[18] See http://www.ozhelp.org.au/about/index.html

offering different ways in which employees can simultaneously satisfy their work and personal life expectations. Future research should explore these linkages. (Lingard & Francis, 2005a, p. 1053)

The results of a 2003 employee study suggested that the most effective organisational responses to reducing turnover and creating more effective work-life balance are those that combine work-family policies with other human resources practices, including work redesign and commitment-enhancing incentives. (Batt & Valour, 2003)

As stated on the New Zealand government *Work-Life Balance Project* website and related literature, "work-life balance means different things to different people and their organisations. So there's no 'one size fits all' solution." (Yasbek, 2004). Collaborating with employers, employees and unions in public and private sectors, the project is designed to develop practical tools for implementing work-life balance initiatives in New Zealand businesses and workplaces. These tools will be "designed to meet the needs of both organisations and workers, and will address a wide range of work-life balance issues."[19]

Yet, while this multilayered approach seems to be effective, some researchers argue that it does not go far enough.

A systems approach and cultural change

"we still have a significant challenge if we are to institutionalise this new way of working and managing the workforce. This will require viewing work-life as a cultural change endeavour to a much greater degree than is the case today." (Harrington, 2007, p. 23)

In the last few years, researchers and practitioners have begun to argue that policies, practices and legislation, while necessary, are not sufficient to make change. Collaborative implementation with industry-wide conviction, cultural change and a systems approach is the only way to be effective.

Although specifically focused on physical safety, Biggs and colleagues made an interesting point in 2005 that could have broader implications for worker wellbeing. They argue for an industry-wide collaboration relating to safety regulations, with which

it may be possible to use the ensuing collective bidding power for project tenders to reach a position that allows companies to compete for contracts without jeopardising employee safety. Such an industry partnership may allow companies to put action to the desire of improving worker safety, while ensuring that they do not suffer an undue business disadvantage while doing so. (Biggs et al, 2005, p. 9).

The implications of this relate to broader cultural changes. Yet, this, it is understood will be difficult to achieve. This is highlighted in a remark made in the 2004 *Snapshot* report revealing one of the potential impediments to cultural and industry-wide change – "many organisations did not want to reveal details of their policies as they were considered a competitive advantage." (Polish & Carroll, 2004, p. 10)

In 2006, Nuria Chinchilla and Elizabeth Torres examined three models of relationships between workers and organisations, and considered why employers would wish to

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[19] See http://www.dol.govt.nz/worklife/

become "family-responsible." The three models discussed were: the mechanistic model (work-life policies as a marketing strategy); the psycho-sociological model (used to attract and retain talented employees); and the anthropological/humanistic model (a family-responsible culture, treating employees as complete human beings). The latter model, it is argued, illustrates an "authentic concern for employees" focusing on employee satisfaction, not just on performance and productivity. (Chinchilla & Torres, 2006, p. 8). Within the family-responsible model, it is important to remember the following areas to address:

- Policies - job flexibility, professional support, family services and non-salary benefits;
- Facilitators – making best use of the four pillars of leadership, communication, responsibility and strategy;
- Culture - recognise the existence of practices that most commonly hinder advance toward flexible culture (e.g. workaholism);
- Results - measure the impact of the three previous elements. (Chinchilla & Torres, 2006, p. 4).

The authors argue that

> changes in an organisation can only be made from top to bottom; therefore, employers must believe that work and family are not incompatible, but complementary … The family is the place where important competencies are developed - competencies that all companies need, such as helpfulness, team work, negotiation, delegation, empathy, leadership. For that reason, family-responsible employers are not a luxury but a necessity for 21st century society. (Chinchilla & Torres, 2006, p. 12).

This argument is reaffirmed in the Australian context, with Don Edgar arguing in his *War on Work* that, the 'work' of family must be recognised and rewarded in workplace management systems, for "producing and maintaining people, especially healthy and socially functioning people, is just as important as producing things to consume or services of a more formal kind." (Edgar, 2005, p. 170) Commitment to this concept will require a shift in cultural attitudes and the implementation of a total systems approach in the workplace.

Researchers from the Boston College for the Center for Family and Work argue that constructive cultural change in the future must be achieved by prioritising the follow key areas:

- Influencing leaders through:
  - Clear business case
  - Training for managers
  - Internal surveys and focus groups
  - Identify and support champions.
- Helping individuals make and negotiate good career choices
- Developing and implementing HR policies and programs;
- Influencing social policy through:
  - Internal and external partnerships
  - Media campaigns. (Harrington, 2007, pp. 13-19)

In the context of workplace stress in Victoria, the authors of a 2006 report strongly supported the notion of a clear business case that included organisational outcomes (e.g. absenteeism and economic measures) to encourage leaders to adopt systems approaches. (LaMontagne et al, 2006, p. 40) Leadership is seen by

many as the key to change. When making organisational changes it is argued, it must be clear that changes are cultural, not simply "something at a more surface level," and that work-life is not just the domain of HR departments, but a shared organisational vision. (Harrington, 2007, p. 14 and p. 20)

The Building Commission newsletter, *Inform,* stated in 2005 that the continued adoption of the concept of work-life balance "may result in long-term culture change", but that "successful implementation will undoubtedly rest on the ability of participating organisations to make work and family priorities central to overall business success." (Building Commission, 2005, p. 8)

As argued by members of the Boston College, "many leaders are skeptical about the impact of work-life programs on their critical business metrics, especially on bottom line financial performance." (Harrington, 2007, p. 14) In Australia, Don Edgar supported this statement, saying that many managers fail to see that profit comes from good performance and this is the result of employee commitment and "feeling valued as a whole person." The evidence on cost-benefits of work-life and wellbeing programs is increasingly clear. (Edgar, 2005, pp. 15-18)

In a 2001 study to identify "excellent workplaces in Australia", Darryll Hull and Vivienne Read concluded that 15 themes were the main drivers of workplace excellence. Many of these drivers have been discussed in the course of this literature review. They are:

- *Quality of working relationships* (a supportive environment)
- *Workplace leadership* (focus on leadership and energy rather than management and administration
- *Having a say* (employee participation in decisions)
- *Clear values*
- *Being safe* (both physical and psychological safety, and emotional stability)
- *The built environment* (a high standard of accommodation with regard to the particular industry type).
- *Recruitment* (getting the right people to work in the location is important, and they need to share the same values and approach to work as the rest of the group).
- *Pay and conditions* (at least to a level that the people who work there see as reasonable).
- *Getting Feedback* (employee contribution to the success of the place, and their individual performance over time).
- *Autonomy and uniqueness* (the capacity of the organisation to tolerate and encourage the sense of difference that excellent workplaces develop.
- *A sense of ownership and identity* (being seen to be different and special through pride in the place of work, knowing the business and controlling the technology).
- *Learning* (being able to learn on the job, acquire skills and knowledge from everywhere, and develop a greater understanding of the whole workplace.
- *Passion* (commitment to the workplaces).
- *Having fun*
- *Community connections* (being part of the local community). (Hull & Read, 2003, p. 29)

More importantly, they argue, in all those organisations that were identified as 'excellent', while workplace leadership was important, "more importance was placed on Shared Values as a touchstone of excellence." (Hull & Read, 2003, p. 29)

5 CONCLUSION

This review has highlighted a number of barriers within the Australian construction industry that have influenced the implementation of wellbeing programs and initiatives. Perhaps the strongest obstacle is the male-dominated industry culture, with its tradition of long hours both at the top and bottom levels of organisations. Competitive tendering drives the need for those long hours and perhaps restricts industry-wide discussion of wellbeing for fear of losing the 'competitive edge' in a shrinking labour market - provision of suitable family-friendly policies can be an incentive in getting staff to apply to an organisation through it becoming an employer of choice. (Daniels & French, p. 163)

Nonetheless, in order to combat the projected labour shortages in Australia, employers will need to become facilitators, creating innovative ways to overcome obstacles and to attract the supply of labour available. The construction industry must challenge the existing culture and move toward a systems approach in addressing the wellbeing of its employees. The benefits for workers are obvious: job and life satisfaction; a greater sense of control; less stress and better health. For the construction industry, the benefits are just as clear: improved attraction and retention of high performing staff; reduced staff turnover; reduced absenteeism and associated costs; and increased productivity.

A firm belief in employees as people within a broader social context is the foundation of the wellbeing concept. Evidence suggests that workplaces that enhance the wellbeing of their employees and have high workplace standards, create stronger businesses that are more attractive and corporately responsible. Effective employee wellbeing needs to be part of regular business and embedded into an organisational culture.

According to the Hewitt *Best Employers in ANZ* study, the largest employee research project and market practice audit in Australia and New Zealand, being a *Best Employer* "means something to everyone who impacts your success:

- To your **leaders** it means they share a common vision and have chartered a clear course for the future.
- To your **HR team** it means they have implemented the right people practices to inspire high performance.
- To your **employees** it means they see a future, believe in and are excited by it, and understand what it means for them and their work.
- To your **shareholders** high employee Engagement will translate into better business results and that you are well–positioned for growth and transformation.
- To your **customers** it means you will deliver on your customer promise as you have on your employee promise.
- To **potential employees** it means your organisation is a great place to work." [20]

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[20] See http://was7.hewitt.com/bestemployers/anz/

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ATTACHMENT 2: INVITATION LETTER TO COMPANIES

7 May 2007

Dear

BUILDING INDUSTRY WELLBEING RESEARCH PROJECT

We are writing to inform you of an important and innovative Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) research initiative and to invite you to participate as one of 31 commercial construction companies or sub-contractor representatives.

The research is being undertaken as wellbeing and emotional health problems take a heavy toll on the workplace in the form of work absences, decreased productivity, turnover, motivation and engagement. Mental health problems are now one of the principal causes of workplace absenteeism.

The research has been designed to inform the development of an industry wellbeing plan. We envisage the plan will provide a coordinated strategic framework endorsed by BICC, which identifies the actions required of Government, industry groups and unions, employers and individuals to effectively address wellbeing in the workplace. The research will also identify the tools and support services required to deliver the desired outcomes of the plan.

The research will:

a) Provide a clear picture of what actions are currently taking place to address wellbeing / work and life balance issues at the workplace level; and
b) Find out what is causing pressure for individuals at different levels in the industry.

Equilibrium Worklife Solutions, a business with considerable experience of the local construction industry, has been appointed to coordinate this work in two stages.

The first stage will be undertaken via a telephone interview with you, or a representative of your company best placed to discuss, in detail, the approach you are currently taking in relation to managing employee wellbeing which, at this stage, may be little or nothing at all. This work is scheduled to take place between 14 and 25 May 2007.

The second stage, which is scheduled for June - October 2007, will involve conducting a comprehensive series of focus groups of employees from across the industry to identify recurring issues, good practice and new ideas in order to determine workplace initiatives which will have the greatest impact on wellbeing across the sector.

You can expect a call from Siusan MacKenzie or one of her colleagues at Equilibrium Worklife Solutions in the coming weeks to discuss your participation in this research project and additional information is attached.

To our knowledge nothing like this research has ever been conducted amongst construction personnel in Australia, or overseas. The BICC is proud to be proactively leading the way by doing the research necessary to provide a sound strategic framework to address employee wellbeing - which we know is so fundamental to the sustainability of our industry. Your support and participation in this project will be most appreciated.

Yours sincerely

Bob Merriman   **Tony Arnel**

Chair BICC   **Chair BICC, Reinventing the Image Sub Committee**

ATTACHMENT 3: EMPLOYER INTERVIEW GUIDE

	Questions for employer snapshot	Issues being explored
1	Have you noticed anything that makes you think people in the industry are stressed? Can you tell me about a situation or situations where people have demonstrated signs of 'stress' at work? Prompts if necessary: • Personal relationship breakdowns • Financial crisis • Drug , alcohol abuse • Work and life balance conflict • History of mental illness What triggers the need for interventions at work to address symptoms of 'stress' or a personal crisis?	*Gathering of anecdotes to set the scene*
2	In your experience how do such personal crises affect the workplace?	*Home to work impact*
3	What about where the pressure of work gets to people – can you tell me about what currently causes this sort of pressure? In your experience, how has this sort of pressure impacted on impact on individual wellbeing?	*Perceived causes of work pressure* *Work to home impact*
4	What initiatives do you have in place to help people mange pressure whether it emanates from home or from work?	*Use of primary, secondary & tertiary interventions as defined* **on P11 Workplace Stress in Victoria Report**
5	Is it handled differently for white collar and blue collar employees?	*Identify service gaps*
6	In your experience are issues the same across all age groups?	*Do support and services need to target by age group*
7	Who currently manages staff wellbeing issues?	*Who to target with information, support services and tools*
8	As an employer, is the issue of wellbeing of staff a genuine concern for your company? If so, how much of a concern – where does it sit for example in relation to OHS? Do you have any ideas for how the industry could help your company to better manage staff wellbeing – what could industry do to assist you? • Proactively • Reactively	*What support and tools would be most helpful for managers and organisations*

ATTACHMENT 4: EMPLOYEE SURVEY

Measurement of work/life pressure

1. **How often have you experienced each of the following during the past six months?**

For the purpose of this survey, personal responsibilities includes tasks such as household duties, taking care of others, or staying in touch with various friend and relatives

		Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Most of the time
a.	I come home from work too tired to do some of the things I wanted to do	❑	❑	❑	❑
b.	Because of my job, I didn't have the energy to do things with my family or other important people in my life	❑	❑	❑	❑
c.	I was preoccupied with my work while I was at home / away form work	❑	❑	❑	❑
d.	My job made it difficult for me to maintain the kind of relationships with my family that I would like	❑	❑	❑	❑
e.	The amount of time my job takes up made it difficult to fulfill personal responsibilities	❑	❑	❑	❑
f.	Because of my job I didn't have enough time to participate in non work activities I find relaxing and enjoyable	❑	❑	❑	❑
g.	The pressure I feel from my job made me behave in ways that are unacceptable at home	❑	❑	❑	❑
h.	Talking with someone at work helped me deal with problems at home	❑	❑	❑	❑

		Minimal	Moderate	Severe	Very Severe
2.	**During the past six months I would rate the interference of my job with my personal life as:**	❑	❑	❑	❑

		Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Most of the Time
3.	**How often have you experienced each of the following during the past six months?**				
a.	I was too tired to be effective at work because of the things I had to do at home	❑	❑	❑	❑
b.	My family or personal life drained me of the energy I needed to do my job	❑	❑	❑	❑
c.	I was preoccupied with personal responsibilities while at work	❑	❑	❑	❑
d.	My personal responsibilities made it difficult to get along with my supervisor and coworkers in the way that I would like	❑	❑	❑	❑
e.	The amount of time my personal responsibilities took up made me work less that I wanted to	❑	❑	❑	❑
f.	The schedule demands of my personal responsibilities kept me from getting work done on time at my job	❑	❑	❑	❑
g.	The pressure I feel from my personal responsibilities made me behave in ways that were unacceptable at work	❑	❑	❑	❑
h.	Talking with someone at home helped me deal with problems at work	❑	❑	❑	❑
i.	During the past six months I made personal sacrifices to get work done:	❑	❑	❑	❑

4. **Please pick a number between 1 (totally dissatisfied) and 10 (totally satisfied) to indicate how satisfied or dissatisfied you are with the following:**

a. The hours you work each week? ....

b. The flexibility available to you at work to balance work and non-work ....

c. Your current work/life balance? ....

5. **When your work and personal life are interfering with each other, how strongly is each of the following aspects of your life negatively affected?**

	Does not apply to me	Minimal negative effect	Moderate negative effect	Severe negative effect	Very severe negative effect
a. Getting along with spouse or partner	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
b. Getting along with children	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
c. Getting along with extended family & friends	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
d. Getting enough sleep	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
e. Cigarettes smoked	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
f. Alcohol intake	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
g. Eating habits	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
h. Taking care of personal health an fitness	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
i. Ability to remain feeling calm and relaxed	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
j. Ability to participate in hobbies and leisure activities	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
k. Ability to control anger	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
l. Ability to focus on the job at work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
m. Willingness to 'go the extra mile' at work / take on extra work	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
n. Arriving on time	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
o. Coming to work everyday	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑
p. Relationships at work with supervisors, coworkers and subbies	❑	❑	❑	❑	❑

6. **What is the main source of stress in your life at this time?**

....

....

....

7. **Who have you talked to about feeling stressed?**

a. No one ❑ b. Boss or supervisor ❑ c. Doctor ❑

d. Parent ❑ e. Partner ❑ f. Incolink ❑

g. Mate ❑ h. Counsellor ❑ i. Other (please specify in general terms) ❑

8. **Which age group do you belong to?**

❑ 16 – 25 years ❑ 46 – 55 years
❑ 26 – 35 years ❑ 56 – 65 years
❑ 36 – 45 years ❑ 66 + years

9. **Who lives in your household?**

    ❑ No one, I live by myself

    ❑ I live with my partner

    ❑ I live with my partner and one or more children all or some of the time

    ❑ I live alone with one or more children all or some of the time

    ❑ I live with one or both parents

    ❑ I live with one or more adults who are neither my partner or my parent

10. **Which best describes your current situation?**

    ❑ Never married

    ❑ Married or not married but living with a partner

    ❑ Separated

    ❑ Divorced

    ❑ Widowed

ATTACHMENT 5: EMPLOYEE DISCUSSION GROUP GUIDE

Questions for employee focus groups

Work/Life balance in general

1. Do you think your life is in balance - If I was to ask your partner what would she say?

2. What makes you think this? What are the symptoms?

3. Do you think people are looking for better work/life balance? If so, why?

Construction industry

4. What about in this industry in general (not your company) in particular. Do you think people's lives are in balance?

5. Have you noticed any signs that make you think people in the construction industry are stressed?

6. Can you tell me about a situation or situations at work where someone (no names) has demonstrated that they are stressed / having trouble balancing their work responsibilities with life outside work?

7. How often do you think situations like this are an issue?

Pressure from work (provide definition of work/life conflict)

8. Would you consider your job stressful? Why?

9. How does this sort of pressure impact on:

   a. You personally – your individual wellbeing – how does it make you feel?

   b. Your family - families – how does it make them feel?

   c. The company?

10. Is it the same for people in other roles?

11. What aspects of your job help you to achieve work/life balance?

Pressure from life away from work

12. In your experience what are the sorts of things / pressures from life outside work that commonly impact on people in construction?

13. How do these situations affect the workplace?

   a. Colleagues

   b. The job

14. What do you give up because of working in this industry? What suffers in your life?

15. Does good money compensate for loss of time?

Suggestions

16. Do you think the wellbeing of employees including work/life balance is something the industry should be paying more attention to? Why?

17. Does your company help people balance thier work with life outside work?

    a. How do they help?

    b. How do they know people need help?

    c. How do you wish they would help?

18. In an ideal world, what would be the most helpful thing your employer could do to improve your work/life balance?

19. Do you have any ideas for how the pressure from work/life conflict in the construction industry generally could be reduced?